NATION

Marriage does not make husband wife's owner: HC

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Sensex jumps 1,078 points to settle at 6-week high

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Pooran, Marsh take LSG to 209 vs Capitals

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 25 MARCH 2025 | TUESDAY | BENGALURU | 24 RAMADAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 82| Pages: 8

Kamra's 'traitor' joke is lost on Shinde

Sena men vandalise hotel over traitor joke but face no action; Show venue demolished

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday sought stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra's apology for "insulting" Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

This was after police arrested 12 Sena workers of the Shinde-led Shiv Sena for ransacking the venue in Mumbai where Kamra made the 'traitor' jibe.

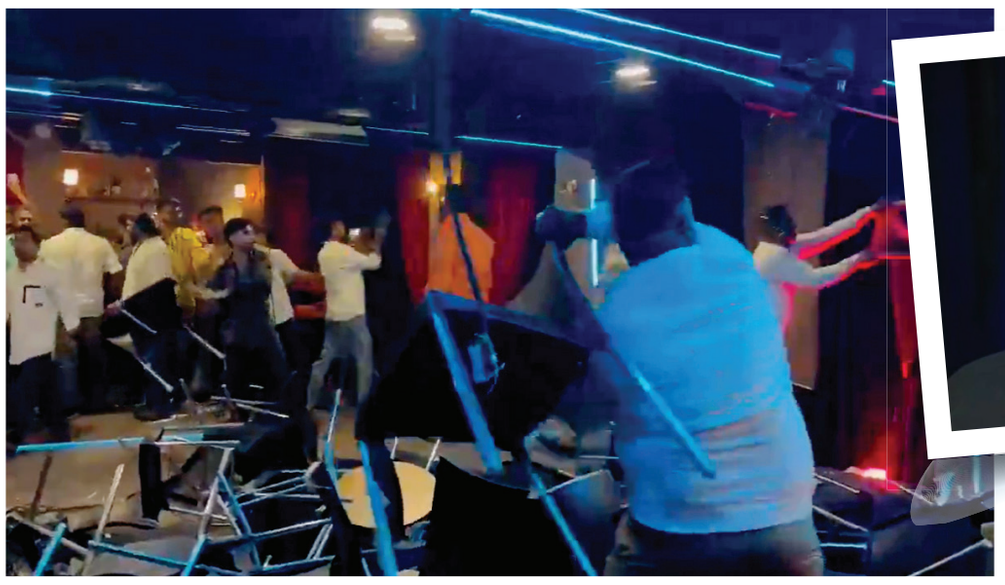
Hours later, a magistrate's court granted bail to all of them.

Hours later Mumbai's civic body demolished Habitat Studio in Khar, in which Kamra had filmed the show.

Kamra taunted Shinde using a modified version of a Hindi song from the film 'Dil To Pagal Hai', eliciting laughter from the audience.

Fadnavis asserted that "urban Naxals" and "Left liberals" supporting such acts will be taught a lesson.

Mumbai police registered an FIR against Kamra for making defamatory remarks against Shinde. The police also registered a case against 40 Shiv Sena workers for vandalising the Habitat studio in Khar area, where Kamra's show was held, and a hotel where the studio is located.



They shouted slogans like "Shiv Sena Zindabad". When the police intervened, they allegedly pushed the on-duty personnel and also manhandled hotel staffers. Kamra told police that he 'won't apologise'.

Shiv Sena legislator Murji Patel said the party workers will not allow Kamra to move on the streets if he doesn't apologise to Shinde in two days. Maharashtra minister of state for Home Yogesh Kadam said Kamra's location was being traced and strict action will be taken.

Shiv Sena (Shinde) workers vandalise the venue of comedian Kunal Kamra's show after his remarks on Maharashtra Dy CM Eknath Shinde, in Khar area in Mumbai, Sunday night **PHOTO: PTI**

Earlier in the day, Habitat Studio, the performance and event venue in Mumbai, announced that they were shutting down after the vandalism.

In an Instagram post on Monday, the studio said artists are "solely responsible for their views and creative choices" and they have never been involved in the content performed by them.

"But recent events have made us rethink about how we get blamed and targeted every time almost like we are the proxy for the performer. In a previous post on Monday, Habitat Studio issued an apology to "all those hurt by this video".

Habitat Studio, where Kamra's show was held, is the same venue where the controversial 'India's Got Latent' show was filmed and led to major controversy last month. *—PTI*

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HC raps govt as home of Nagpur rioter razed

NAGPUR, 24 MARCH

The two-story residence of Fahim Khan, an alleged mastermind behind the communal violence in Nagpur on 17 March, was flattened on Monday by local civic authorities who claimed that the house was constructed illegally. The operation, which involved bulldozers and a heavy police presence assisted by drones, also saw removal of an illegally constructed balcony at the house of another accused, Yusuf Sheikh, in the Mahal area where the riots occurred. Just hours after the demolition began in the morning, Nagpur Bench of Bombay High Court intervened, issuing a stay on demolitions and criticising the administration for its "high-handedness." *—PTI*

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Pressure to perform burdens students: SC

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Supreme Court on Monday said "relentless pressure" to perform in a purely score-based education system and "extreme competition" for limited seats in premier educational institutions put a "terrifying burden" on students' mental health. A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan aware of the rising incidents of student suicides said it was high time to formulate comprehensive guidelines to mitigate the underlying causes contributing to the issue. The bench constituted a National Task Force to address mental health concerns of students and prevent suicides and said duty of colleges was not just to ensure excellence of the students but also their mental well-being. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Nandi Hills to close on weekdays from 24 March to 25 April

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 24 MARCH

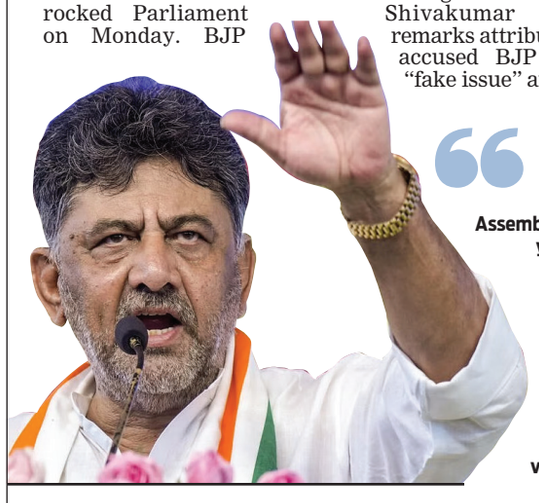
Nandi Hills, a popular tourist destination, will be closed to visitors on weekdays for one month starting Monday to facilitate road improvements costing Rs 4.90 crores. Deputy Commissioner Ravindra PN announced that the closure will be in effect from 24 March to 25 April, with access permitted from 6.30pm on Fridays until 8.00am on Mondays. The contractor responsible for the seven-kilometre road improvement has requested the ban on public entry during weekdays to expedite work, a suggestion supported by the Public Works Department. This is not the first instance of closures; Nandi Hills was previously inaccessible for 45 days in late 2021 due to road repairs following heavy rains. *—Salar News*

BJP corners Cong over Muslim quota

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The purported remarks of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on the issue of reservation for Muslims rocked Parliament on Monday. BJP mounted a fierce attack on Congress alleging that it wanted to change the Constitution to give religion-based quota to appease the minorities.

Congress and its leader Shivakumar refuted the remarks attributed to him and accused BJP of raising a "fake issue" and indulging in disinformation to stall Parliament.



"I am a sensible senior politician...I have been in the Assembly for the past 36 years. I have basic common sense. I have never said anything on changing Constitution. I casually said that there will be so many changes after various judgments

Shivakumar made a statement during an interaction with a TV channel, where he purportedly suggested that a "good day" may come when the Constitution may be changed to accommodate quota for Muslims.

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju led the charge against Shivakumar and demanded either the party remove him from the post or announce that it will change the Constitution to provide reservation to the minority community.

Kiren Rijiju **PHOTO: PTI**

Rijiju said he wanted to raise a sensitive matter, where a senior Congress leader who holds a constitutional post has said the party will change the Constitution to provide reservation in contract work to the Muslim community.

"This is an assault on the Constitution of India, provided by Dr B R Ambedkar," he said

Rijiju said, "This is Muslim League's policy and it was rejected by Sardar Patel...We want you should seek the resignation of the deputy chief minister of Karnataka."

Congress also gave notices for breach of privilege against Nadda and Rijiju for "misleading" Parliament.

Shivakumar claimed that he had been misquoted and asserted that he "never said that we will change the Constitution". The Congress also gave notices for breach of privilege against Nadda and Rijiju for "misleading" Parliament. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

SC Collegium transfers Delhi judge to Allahabad

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

After two meetings, the Supreme Court Collegium on Monday recommended the repatriation of Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma, who is facing a probe into the alleged discovery of huge stash of cash from his official residence in Delhi after a fire incident, to his parent Allahabad High Court.

Hours after the transfer recommendation to the Centre was made public in a resolution uploaded on the website of the top court, the president of the Allahabad High Court Bar Association(AHCBA) Anil Tiwari said the high court lawyers will go on an indefinite strike from Tuesday in protest against this move.

Justice Varma's proposed transfer could come into effect after the Centre accepts the recommendation, which came on a day when the Delhi High Court in a notice withdrew judicial work from Justice Varma "with immediate effect".

The AHCBA last week voiced its opposition to any such move, saying the high court is not a "trash bin". In a series of resolutions, it also urged the CJI to allow investigating agencies to take action against Justice Varma. *—PTI*

BBMP to use AI to identify illegal constructions: DKS

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) will soon implement artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline property-related services, including delivering documents to residents' doorsteps and identifying illegal constructions.

Announcing the initiative after a meeting with city legislators on the upcoming BBMP Budget 2025-26, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar highlighted how AI would help detect unauthorised building extensions and ensure property owners pay the correct taxes. "Many property owners have constructed extra floors without approval and are not paying the required taxes. AI will assist in identifying and measuring such violations, ensuring compliance," he stated.

Shivakumar also revealed that around seven lakh properties had outstanding property tax payments, however only 1 lakh were brought under the tax bracket so far. A new law now empowers BBMP to take action against illegal properties. Additionally, private roads in gated communities will soon be declared public roads.

As part of the digital push, BBMP will also launch a doorstep delivery service for khata documents from April. "All property records have been digitised. We will conduct awareness programmes with MLAs to inform residents about the process," he said. *—PTI*

Cheetah, her cubs pelted with stones in MP

SHEOPUR/NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

A female cheetah and her four cubs were pelted with stones on Monday as they tried to hunt a calf on the outskirts of a village in Madhya Pradesh, raising concerns over the implementation of Project Cheetah among conservationists and wildlife activists.

According to official sources, the incident occurred around 9am near a village in Sheopur, where cheetahs from Africa were introduced under the project. Videos on social media purported to show the cheetahs near an under-construction railway bridge while several villagers, armed with sticks, stand at a distance. *—PTI*

HELLO, WATER CRISIS

Residents of JC Road in Bengaluru were seen standing in long queues on Monday to collect water distributed from water tanks by the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

WIFE CALLS HIM SEX PREDATOR

Rippling founder accuses wife of harassment in divorce case

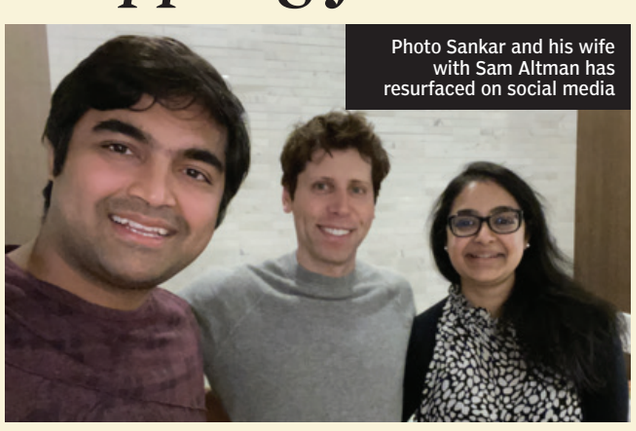


Photo Sankar and his wife with Sam Altman has resurfaced on social media

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

An embittered battle across three countries, the marital dispute between Co-founder of $10 billion HR Tech company Rippling, Prasanna Sankar and his wife Divya Sasidharan has taken the social media by storm with accusations and counter accusations.

Rippling is based in San Francisco.

Sankar took to social media on Sunday to accuse Shashidar, of infidelity and abducting their nine-year-old son.

His wife, a US citizen, in turn sought the help of Chennai police to retrieve her nine-year-old son who was allegedly kidnapped by her tech entrepreneur husband. She accused him of being a grave sexual predator and of tax evasion.

On 23 March, Sankar came out with his story through 'X' where he accused his wife of infidelity, posting screenshots conversations and hotel bookings with another married man Anoop, whose wife alerted him about their alleged affair.

He then alleged that in order to get higher alimony she filed many false complaints in US accusing him of domestic violence, rape and distributing explicit content. He said the US Police had cleared him of all charges.

"I had previously filed an abduction case in the US and the judge ruled in favour of me and asked her to return the child," he said.

The couple later reached an understanding to share custody of their son and settle in Chennai and signed an understanding wherein he would pay her Rs 9 crore and Rs 4.3 lakh per month as alimony and maintenance. As part of the agreement, Divya was required to deposit their child's passport in a common locker and instead sought more financial compensation by planning to file for divorce in the US.

Sankar stated when he refused to return their son until the passport was secured, she chose to file a kidnapping complaint against him.

Sankar said he escaped with their child and is seeking to file legal petition to prevent harassment. *—Agencies*

Dad and son held for murder of City factory owner

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Madanayakanahalli police have apprehended a father and son duo for the alleged murder of a factory owner who had been demanding repayment of a loan. The accused, Syed Tajuddin, 50, and his son Syed Ayub, were working at a factory owned by Ramesh in Kadabagere Cross. Tajuddin borrowed Rs 6 lakh from Ramesh but had not repaid the loan. Both men had also been absent from work. As Ramesh sought repayment, tensions escalated, leading to a confrontation. Reports indicate that the father and son threatened Ramesh, and during a heated argument on Sunday afternoon, the situation turned violent. The pair allegedly attacked Ramesh with a machete, resulting in his death at the scene. *—SALAR NEWS*

Belagavi employee falls for honey trap, loses Rs 80K

BELAGAVI, 24 MARCH

A health department official with the Belagavi City Corporation has reportedly fallen prey to a blackmail scheme, paying Rs 80,000 to an unidentified woman who threatened to share compromising video footage on social media. The officer received a message on WhatsApp from an unknown individual at midnight 15 days ago, which led to further exchanges, including video calls. The woman sent explicit content and demanded similar footage from him. After sharing his videos, she threatened to publish them unless he paid her. Seeking to escape her clutches, the officer, who wishes to remain anonymous, confirmed that he has retained evidence of her blackmail, including screenshots and banking transactions. He is now planning to approach the police for assistance in this matter.
—SALAR NEWS

Rowdy sheeter hacked to death at Kolar Gold Fields

KOLAR GOLD FIELDS, 24 MARCH

A 31-year-old man, identified as Shivakumar, was brutally murdered by four unidentified assailants on Kamasamudram Road under the Andersonpet police jurisdiction. The incident occurred around noon while Shivakumar was accompanied by his 17-year-old girlfriend. The attackers, who arrived on two motorcycles, struck him with lethal weapons, inflicting grave head injuries. Despite Shivakumar's attempt to flee, he was pursued and ultimately murdered before the assailants escaped. The girl, unharmed, reported the incident to the Andersonpet police, who have initiated a manhunt based on her information. Shivakumar was known to have a history of assault charges and was registered as a rowdy sheeter. *—SALAR NEWS*

Youths detained for assaulting SSLC student

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

The Chandra Layout police have detained five youths following the alleged assault of two SSLC (Class 10) students in Gangondanahalli. The incident, which occurred around 8.30pm on 17 March, stemmed from the minors reportedly teasing a girl associated with the primary accused, identified as Sufiyan and Zubair, who, along with three others, allegedly lured the victims to a secluded area and attacked them with sticks. The parents of the victims alerted the police, which prompted an investigation. Authorities also confirmed that a video of the assault has surfaced as evidence. Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) S. Girish stated that further action will follow a comprehensive inquiry. *—SALAR NEWS*

Now, BJP alleges Cong govt tapping phones

Ashoka says ruling party legislators have also admitted to this

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka alleged the government is doing this to control both internal opponents and opposition ***PHOTO: PTI***

Amid the honey trap controversy, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka on Monday accused the government of "tapping" the phones of key State leaders, including ministers and ruling party MLAs.

According to him, several ruling party legislators have also admitted to this.

The BJP leader alleged that the government was resorting to phone tapping to control both its internal opponents and opposition parties.

"It's happening 100 per cent. Don't doubt it. If they need to send 'her,' ministers have to be tracked, and for that, phones have to be tapped. This government is fully engaged in phone tapping," Ashoka told reporters.

He cited "honey trap" attempts, echoing claims by ministers and MLAs.

Ashoka added that he and Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries H D Kumaraswamy had previously alleged phone tapping.

Now, even ruling party MLAs claim their phones are being tapped, further substantiating the accusation.

"The government is trying to control its opponents, whether from the ruling party or the opposition. My phone, along with those of all opposition MLAs, is being tapped. This has been happening ever since Congress came to power," he claimed.

Minister K N Rajanna told the Assembly that 48 legislators had fallen victim, with the network operating statewide.

Reacting to these allegations, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar advised Ashoka to file a police complaint.

Meanwhile, State Home Minister G Parameshwara stated that he had not received any complaints so far.

"We haven't received any complaint yet.

We will act immediately if we receive one. After you raised this issue, I verified it, but so far, no police station has received such a complaint," he told reporters.

He added that if a complaint is lodged and an investigation begins, the government will take action. *—PTI*

SC TO HEAR PIL ON K'TAKA

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking an independent investigation into alleged honey-trapping incidents involving legislators, public servants, and judges in Karnataka. The case was brought forward by Binay Kumar Singh, a resident of Jharkhand, who has requested that either the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or a Special Investigation Team conduct the inquiry, comprising officers not influenced by the Karnataka government.

Singh's petition calls to monitor the investigation or to appoint a committee led by a retired Supreme Court judge.

Allegations surfaced after Karnataka's Cooperation Minister, KN Rajanna, revealed that 48 individuals had reportedly fallen victim to honey traps, with intimate videos circulated online. He claimed the victims span across various political parties, including prominent figures. *—ANI*

A viral video shows hospital staffers manually pumping oxygen for patients at Gulbarga Institute of Medical Sciences ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Power cut hits GIMS hospital

KALABURAGI/ BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Just a day after Medical Education Minister Sharanprakash Patil visited Gulbarga Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS), the hospital experienced a power cut that impacted patients on ventilators. The minister was at GIMS on Saturday to inspect the progress of the super-speciality hospital.

In ICU ward 429 on the 4th floor, the ventilators for beds 1 and 2 stopped working. This affected a woman from Chittapur taluk, who was admitted for respiratory issues; and a male cancer patient from Sedam taluk, according to a relative of one of the patients. The condition of post-surgical patients in the critical care unit also became serious.

As the patients struggled to breathe, nurses provided oxygen through a Bain circuit until the power was restored. Videos of relatives confronting nurses over the ventilator failure have been circulating online. The families have asked the authorities to file a complaint and take corrective measures.

Despite the video showing the seriousness of the outage, Patil said, "Due to the increased number of beds in the hospital, power demand also increased, leading to the outage. However, no harm was caused to the patients."

GIMS Medical Superintendent Dr Shivakumar told Salar News, "There was a power outage for about an hour, but it did not cause any problems to the patients. Yes, ventilator disruptions took place, but we got it sorted out." He also confirmed that hospital staffers were manually pumping oxygen for patients, including those undergoing post-surgery recovery and receiving treatment for respiratory and cancer-related ailments.

Since Jayadeva Hospital, which was located in the GIMS building, has been relocated, GIMS is now using those floors. However, as Jayadeva authorities removed their transformer while vacating, it has caused power supply issues. To resolve this, a new transformer is being installed, and an engineer has been assigned to GIMS, the minister said.

He added that more people are now coming to GIMS due to quality treatment. However, some private hospitals are attempting to tarnish GIMS' reputation and misleading videos are being circulated, he said. The minister urged the public to be aware of such false propaganda.
—Salar News

Mom, newborn die due to lack of ICU in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI, 24 MARCH

In Kalaburagi, a mother and her newborn tragically died at a private hospital, sparking outrage from relatives who subsequently attacked the facility. The victims were identified as Imran Razvi's wife and their newborn, who died during delivery at a hospital in Iqbal Colony. Due to the absence of an ICU, the mother was transferred to another private hospital on MSK Mill Road, but she ultimately succumbed to her condition. Angered by the situation, family members vandalised the hospital, causing damage to windows and furniture. Police reported that no formal complaints have been lodged by either the deceased's family or the hospital concerning the attack —Salar News

My resignation letter was fake, says Horatti

HUBBALLI, 24 MARCH

Basavaraj Horatti, the Chairman of the Karnataka Legislative Council, confirmed on Monday that a resignation letter circulating on social media is unsigned and unauthorised. Horatti explained that the letter, prepared by one of his personal assistants without his permission, had been stored in his cupboard since 21 March, 2025.

Basavaraj Horatti.

Representing the Council for an unprecedented eighth consecutive term, Horatti expressed his disappointment with the declining standards of debate and growing indiscipline among legislators. He lamented the deterioration of discussions in both the Council and the Assembly.

"The discussions about issues like honey traps reflect the current state of politics." He expressed concern over the increasing disrespect for the Chair and the failure of members to adhere to basic instructions, prompting him to contemplate his future in the role.

However, amid swirling resignation rumours, Horatti said the unsigned letter lacks authenticity and that he would consult with supporters before making a final decision. He stated, "I am holding off on resigning; many have urged me to remain active in politics." *—Salar News*

Govt aims to make Bengaluru TB-free by 2025

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Bengaluru's Chief Health Officer, Dr Syed Sirajuddin Madani, has called upon health workers and citizens alike to work diligently towards making the BBMP tuberculosis (TB)-free by 2025. Speaking at a programme organised by the BBMP Health Department to mark World Tuberculosis Day, Dr. Madani underscored the importance of public involvement in eradicating the disease, stating, "Those diagnosed with TB must adhere strictly to their six-month medication regimen for effective recovery."

Under India's National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP), significant progress has been made in controlling TB, aided by 143 Primary Health Centres, 6 Community Health Centres, and numerous clinics and testing facilities. The initiative has been further bolstered by the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyan (PMTBMBA) since 2023, which has seen the distribution of over 11,000 nutrition kits to 3,120 TB patients.

Recent data indicates a decline in TB cases in the BBMP from 15,543 in 2023 to 14,059 in 2024, alongside a decrease in the mortality rate from 750 to 702. A recent 100-Day Tuberculosis Campaign reported screening more than 1.3 million vulnerable individuals, confirming 4,010 cases. Dr. Madani's remarks highlight the collective effort needed to eliminate TB from the region. *—Salar News*

CITY BLOOMS

Pink Tabebuia flowers are in full bloom in various parts of Bengaluru, making walks a scenic affair with nature ***PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD***

CRIME BYTES

Mother-in-law murders relator son-in-law

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

The investigation into the murder of real estate businessman Lokanath Singh, who was found dead near BGS Layout in Hesaraghatta, has taken a startling twist. The perpetrator was none other than his own mother-in-law.

Singh, known for his connections with politicians, was killed on 22 March. Initially, police suspected rival gangs. Reports indicate that Singh had blackmailed and married the daughter of a businessman in December.

Singh's mother-in-law reportedly accompanied her daughter to a gathering at a construction site, where she spiked Singh's food with sleeping pills. Following this, she slit his throat.

Soladevanahalli police have since arrested both women for further interrogation. *—Salar News*

'Bigg Boss' players pose with weapons

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Former Bigg Boss Kannada contestants Rajat Kishan and Vinay Gowda are under investigation after allegedly posing with a machete in a social media video, raising serious public safety concerns.

The incident was uncovered by Police Sub-Inspector (PSI) Bhanu Prakash, who monitors social media. The video, posted on Kishan's Instagram account 'bujji', showed the duo brandishing the weapon in a public area, reportedly instilling fear among viewers.

On 20 March, following PSI Prakash's report, the Basaveshwaranagar Police Station registered a First Information Report (FIR). Authorities are examining whether the machete was real or a prop, as even licensed weapon displays can lead to legal repercussions. *—Salar News*

FIX ON THE GO

BMTC launches mobile repair vans for better public transport

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

The Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) has launched five new mobile repair vans to provide swift assistance during road accidents and breakdowns, minimising disruptions to public transport.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy flagged off the vehicles, underscoring the government's commitment to improving urban mobility.

Reddy announced that BMTC has already deployed 1,336 electric buses, with plans to expand the fleet further in response to the need for better transportation facilities and efforts to reduce air pollution.

Currently, BMTC operates 6,835 buses, running an average of 5,875 schedules daily across the city and suburban routes.

To address traffic congestion and minor accidents that often lead to delays, BMTC plans to station at least one mobile repair van in each zone, as well as at major Transport Terminus and key bus depots.

Two mobile vans are operational in the Marathahalli Outer Ring Road and Kempegowda Bus Station, with new vans set to be deployed in prime locations including Shivajinagar and Yeshwanthpur. *—Salar News*

BJP WANTED TO STOP FINANCE BILL: SPEAKER

MANGALURU, 24 MARCH

Assembly Speaker UT Khader on Monday said he would stand by his decision to suspend 18 Opposition BJP MLAs.

Addressing a press conference here, he said, "I had to make that difficult but necessary decision. The MLAs went on a rampage in the House and displayed unruly behaviour on 21 March, before the tabling of the State finance bill."

"I realised they were trying to stall the passing of the Finance Bill and wanted to jeopardise the State's finances.

Without the approval of the bill on the last day of the Budget session, the State's normal functioning would have been crippled," he said. The sixth session of 16th Legislative Assembly was held from 3 March to 21 March. *—PTI*

BAIL PLEA OF MAULVI DISMISSED IN STONE-PELTING CASE

MYSURU, 24 MARCH

The Principal District Session Court dismissed the bail application of Maulvi Mufti Mushtaq Maqbooli on Monday. He was arrested by local police for making inflammatory speeches related to a stone-pelting incident at the Udayagiri police station. This occurred on 10 February, following a provocative speech deemed to have incited a mob, resulting in injuries to police personnel and damage to official vehicles.

Mufti Mustaq Maqbooli was apprehended on 20 February and remanded in judicial custody.

He faces charges of delivering hate speech and outraging religious feelings under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Reports indicate his remarks referenced a controversial social media post targeting a specific religious community in the aftermath of Delhi assembly election results.

His comments allegedly spurred a gathering outside the police station where protesters engaged in stone-pelting. *—Salar News*

Nagpur scribe held for derogatory remarks on Shivaji

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Maharashtra police apprehended Nagpur journalist Prashant Koratkar for making allegedly derogatory comments about 17th-century Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and his son, Chhatrapati Sambhaji. Koratkar was arrested in Telangana and is being transported back to Maharashtra. He faces charges after a conversation with Kolhapur-based historian Indrajeet Sawant, in which Koratkar allegedly made inflammatory remarks that could incite communal discord. The Bombay High Court denied his plea for anticipatory bail. Koratkar denied the accusations, claiming his phone was hacked and has issued a public apology. *—PTI*

8 CPI(M) workers get lifer for BJP man's murder

KANNUR, 24 MARCH

A court in Kannur, Kerala, has sentenced eight members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to life imprisonment for the nearly two-decade-old murder of BJP worker Elambilayi Suraj. Each was also fined Rs 50,000. Among the sentenced were TK Rajeesh, already serving time for his involvement in the 2012 TP Chandrasekharan murder, and PM Manoraj, the brother of Kerala's Chief Minister's press secretary. The ruling followed findings by Principal Sessions Judge KT Nisar Ahammed, who determined that the murder was politically motivated after Suraj left CPI(M) for BJP. On 7 August, 2005, Suraj was attacked and killed outside the Muzhappilangad Telephone Exchange. The prosecution presented 28 witnesses and 51 documents, while two accused have since died. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Rough landing for DyCM, 30 flyers in Himachal

SHIMLA, 24 MARCH

An aircraft carrying over 30 passengers, including Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri and Director General of Police Atul Verma, from Delhi witnessed a narrow escape on Monday morning as it missed the landing spot at Jubbarhatti Airport crossed the runway and hit the studs at the edge of the airstrip. The airport has a 1,230-metre airstrip and is considered one of the most challenging airports due to its tabletop structure, where the runway is perched on an elevated plateau with steep drops on both sides. Agnihotri told reporters that only airport authority or the Directorate General of Civil Aviation could explain what happened but said the plane did not touch the ground where it was supposed to. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said he would speak to the Civil Aviation minister to discuss the matter. *—PTI*

UP court to hear petition on Rahul's citizenship

LUCKNOW, 24 MARCH

The Lucknow Bench of the Uttar Pradesh High Court requested a response from the Central government, for a petition filed by a social activist, alleging that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is ineligible to contest elections due to claims of British citizenship. The petitioner seeks to annul Gandhi's election victory. Deputy Solicitor General had previously asked for an additional eight weeks to reply. This follows a similar petition submitted to the Delhi High Court by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy. Additionally, regarding Gandhi's statement about a "fight against the Indian state," a Sambhal District Court has issued a notice for him to respond by 4 April. *—PTI*

He did nothing wrong: Uddhav, Oppn back Kamra

NDA calls Kamra 'contract comedian'; Oppn says FIR mockery of law

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

The leaders of the ruling Mahayuti on Monday called Kunal Kamra Kamra a "contract comedian" and warned he would be forced to flee the country, while the Opposition dubbed the FIR against him as "mockery of law".

Oppostion said police should specify words which can't be used to criticise the government.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray on Monday said Kamra has not done anything wrong.

"Kamra merely expressed his views. He stated the facts and voiced the public opinion," Thackeray claimed.

State Congress Chief Spokesperson Atul Londhe said, "Why is there so much intolerance? We do not support such vandalism. If sentiments are getting easily hurt, then they could have filed a complaint against him at the police station."

"Kamra is a stand-up comedian and he made some commentary about the current political scenario in the state. If you are against it, then ban the entire stand-up comedy form. Why afraid of mere commentary? It is against freedom of speech," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray slammed the Shinde-led Sena workers for the vandalism.

"In a recent podcast, Prime Minster Narendra Modi said that criticism is an essential part of democracy. However, the behaviour of BJP's ruling alliance partner is contradictory to what Modi said," Aaditya said.

State Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant said in the case where a simple non-cognizable offence can't stand, an FIR is registered and this is "mockery of law".

The police should publish a list of words which cannot be used when criticising the government and it should also declare what is okay for the ruling alliance leaders, Sawant said.

The row sparked by Kamra's jibe at Shinde rocked both the Houses of the state legislature on Monday leading to brief adjournments.

Meanwhile, State Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik said the studio where the programme was shot was illegal.

Sena MP Naresh Mhaske also alleged that the comedian had accepted money from Uddhav Thackeray and was targeting Shinde.

BJP MLA Ram Kadam said Kamra seems to be targeting Shinde on someone's instructions. *—PTI*

Police guard the hotel that was vandalised by Sena (Shinde) workers after comedian Kunal Kamra's remarks on Maharashtra Dy CM Eknath Shinde, in Mumbai's Khar **PHOTO: PTI**

'ILLEGAL AND UNCONSTITUTIONAL'

Parl stalled over Muslim quota

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

BJP on Monday cornered Congress in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha over Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister's Shivakumar's statement on Constitution.

While the pre-lunch period in Lok Sabha was washed out, the entire day's proceedings were disrupted in Rajya Sabha where BJP Chief JP Nadda led the offensive, while also targeting the Congress for giving 4 per cent reservation to Muslims in public contracts in Karnataka.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge asserted that no one can change the Constitution provided by BR Ambedkar.

Outside Parliament, the BJP said the remarks on the Muslim quota have brought to light the Congress' "hidden agenda" of changing the Constitution to provide reservation to the minority community for their votes. Shivakumar's remarks and the Karnataka government's "illegal and unconstitutional" move to provide 4 per cent reservation to Muslims in public contracts in the state are the Congress' efforts to take away the rights of the members of the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the Other Backward Classes (OBC), senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

Raising the issue in Rajya Sabha, Nadda alleged that Congress was disregarding the Constitution by giving religion-based reservation which was not allowed as per the Constitution.

He said the Karnataka government has passed a bill granting 4 per cent reservation in public contracts to minorities and demanded a statement from Kharge. "This blatant attempt to divide the nation for political gain poses a threat to India's unity," the BJP Chief said.

Shivakumar denied making any such claims. *—PTI*

Punjab police detain farmers as they try to approach the Deputy Commissioner (DC) office to protest against the arrest of their farmer leaders, in Amritsar **PHOTO: ANI**

Punjab releases 800 farmers, 450 in jail

CHANDIGARH, MARCH

Following a recent crackdown on protesting farmers, the Punjab police announced the release of nearly 800 farmers from detention. An additional 450 farmers are set to be freed on the direction of the state government.

The police action took place after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government decided to dismantle protest sites, claiming that the demonstrations were disrupting local businesses and daily life. In a statement, Inspector General of Police (Headquarters) Sukhchain Singh Gill confirmed that the government had initiated the release process, particularly prioritising vulnerable groups such as women, the differently-abled, and those over 60.

Protesting farmers have expressed their anger towards the AAP government for detaining their leaders and forcibly removing them from the Shambhu and Khanauri border points, where they had camped since February 2022 after being thwarted in a march to Delhi.

The national coordination committee of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha has called for nationwide demonstrations on 28 March in response to the crackdown. *—PTI*

J'khand to hold caste survey in next FY

RANCHI, 24 MARCH

The caste-based survey will be conducted in Jharkhand in the next financial year, a minister said in the state Assembly on Monday. He said the Personnel department has already been made a nodal agency to hold the task.

"The government is serious about holding the caste-based survey in the state. A decision in this regard has already been taken in February last year. We will make all our efforts to conduct the survey during the next financial year," Transport, Revenue and Land Reforms department minister Deepak Birua said replying to a question raised by Congress MLA Pradip Yadav in the assembly.

Birua said that the department issued a notice on 4 March to hire an agency in a bid to ascertain the total number of people required, levels of work and financial aspect of the exercise and said it will be conducted similar to Telangana and Bihar. *—PTI*

Delhi Budget session begins with 'Kheer' ceremony

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The five-day Budget session of the Delhi Assembly began on Monday with a 'Kheer' ceremony, with BJP leaders saying that "sweetness symbolises progress".

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, will on Tuesday table the first budget of a BJP government in Delhi in more than 26 years.

"Just as Lord Ram returned to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile, we are returning after 27 years. To mark this occasion, we offered 'kheer' to Lord Ram, symbolising the sweetness of Delhi's development," the chief minister said.

The BJP government's "Viksit Delhi Budget" will focus on the economic empowerment of women, better education and health service, improved infrastructure, pollution and waterlogging woes, Gupta had said on Saturday.

Leader of Opposition and former Chief Minister Atishi meanwhile criticized the BJP-led Delhi government for not presenting the Economic Survey ahead of the budget.

"Delhi's budget cannot be formed by making 'kheer', but on the figures of the economy," she said.

"An Economic Survey is always presented before the budget, providing key data on a state or country's financial health. How can a budget be prepared without an Economic Survey? I have not seen this happen in the past ten years," she said. *—PTI*

Delhi CM Rekha Gupta with other ministers participates in the Kheer ceremony ahead of Budget session **PHOTO: PTI**

CAMPAIGN ON DELIMITATION HAS LED TO NATIONAL IMPACT: TN CM STALIN

CHENNAI, 24 MARCH

In the Tamil Nadu Assembly, Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday said the awareness campaign on delimitation, led by the state, created a national level impact. Conveying his "heartfelt gratitude" to all parties including the opposition AIADMK who attended the Joint Action Committee meeting on 22 March, Stalin told the House that a delegation of 39 Members of Parliament from the state would call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 39 MPs belong to DMK as well as its allies, including the Congress and Left parties. Census population. "The awareness campaign by Tamil Nadu has caused an impact at the national level. I convey my hearty thanks to all the parties that took part in the JAC," Stalin said. *—PTI*

Lawyers strike in Sambhal over arrest of mosque committee chief

SAMBHAL, 24 MARCH

A section of lawyers in Sambhal district staged a one-day pen-down strike on Monday to protest the arrest of Zafar Ali, president of the Shahi Jama Masjid Management Committee.

Ali was detained on Sunday in connection with violence during a protest on 24 November last year, which resulted in four deaths. Lawyers claim his arrest aims to prevent him from testifying before a judicial commission established to investigate the incident.

Zafar Ali **PHOTO: X**

Mohammad Nazar Qureshi, president of the Chandousi District Court Bar Association, alleged that Ali's arrest lacked legal justification, as there was no FIR against him. Senior lawyer Shakeel Ahmed echoed this sentiment, warning that the lawyers' discontent might escalate across Uttar Pradesh if such actions persisted.

They pointed to the timing of the arrest, with Ali scheduled to testify in a judicial commission later.

In related developments, a court has scheduled a hearing for Ali's bail plea on 27 March, where the prosecution must present the case diary. Ali faces multiple charges, including rioting and promoting enmity between groups. During his medical examination, he maintained his innocence, saying "I did not instigate any riot. I have been falsely implicated." *—PTI*

'Dry' Gujarat earns Rs 94L from liquor at GIFT City

GANDHINAGAR, 24 MARCH

The state government has earned Rs 94.19 lakh in revenue from the sale of liquor to employees working at Gandhinagar-based Gujarat International Finance TecCity (GIFT City) where alcohol consumption has been permitted since 30 December, 2023. Liquor sale licences at GIFT City have been given to two entities -- West India Recreation Projects Pvt Ltd and The Grand Mercury

Hotels in GIFT city are allowed to serve alcohol but cannot sell bottles. *—PTI*

FINANCE BILL 2025

Govt proposes to abolish Equalisation Levy on online ads

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The government on Monday proposed to abolish the Equalisation Levy or digital tax on online advertisements as part of the 59 amendments to the Finance Bill 2025, which is being debated in the Lok Sabha.

The proposal to remove the Equalisation Levy on online advertisements, according to experts, is aimed at showing an accommodative stance to the US, which has threatened to introduce reciprocal tariffs from 2 April.

The Equalisation Levy was imposed on online advertisement services on 1 June, 2016.

The amendments to Finance Bill 2025 were introduced in the Lok Sabha by Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary.

Last year, the government already removed a 2 per cent Equalisation Levy on e-commerce transactions, but the 6 per cent levy on online advertisements continued.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- The proposal seems aimed at showing an accommodative stance to the US, which has threatened to increase tariffs against India

"Although the 2 per cent levy garnered more criticism from the US, in anticipation of more tariff retaliation by them, the government is trying to show a more accommodative stance, and the removal of 6 per cent Equalisation Levy on online advertising is a step in that direction," AKM Global Tax Partner Amit Maheshwari said. "However, it remains to be seen if this step, coupled with already ongoing diplomatic measures, would lead to any softening of stance by the US,"

Nangia Andersen LLP Partner Vishwas Panjiar said the government's move is a step in the right direction, as it not only brings certainty to taxpayers but also addresses the concerns raised by partner nations (like the US) regarding the unilateral nature of the levy. *—PTI*

Assam Assembly passes Rs 2.63 lakh cr Budget

GUWAHATI, 24 MARCH

The Assam Assembly has approved a Rs 2.63 lakh crore budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year, following the passage of the Assam Appropriation Bill, 2025. Speaker Biswajit Daimary announced the successful clearance, marking a significant step ahead of the assembly elections anticipated in March-April next year.

Finance Minister Ajanta Neog presented the budget on 10 March, detailing various financial incentives aimed primarily at youths and tea garden workers, alongside tax exemptions for salaried individuals. With a projected deficit of Rs 620.27 crore, the government proposed no new taxes while offering additional relief to approximately 1.5 lakh salaried employees.

To support the tea industry, Neog announced a two-year extension of the tax holiday for green tea leaves and a one-time cash benefit of Rs 5,000 to 6.8 lakh tea garden workers. *—PTI*

Rajeev Chandrasekhar takes helm of Kerala BJP

T'PURAM, 24 MARCH

Former Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has officially taken office as the BJP's state president, outlining his commitment to securing power for the NDA in Kerala, a state predominantly governed by the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF.

In his inaugural address to party workers, Chandrasekhar expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other party leaders for the trust placed in him. He emphasised the urgency of transforming Kerala's stagnant development, questioning the state's reliance on debt and the exodus of students seeking education abroad.

"The BJP aims to create a Kerala that attracts investment and generates employment," he asserted, urging party members to spread the message of progress across the state.

Chandrasekhar was the sole nominee for the post, with his elevation announced during the BJP's state council meeting has extensive political experience, having served as Union Minister and Rajya Sabha MP, expressed confidence in leading the BJP to greater success in Kerala.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor congratulated Chandrasekhar, in a post on X. "Congratulations and best wishes. Looking forward to crossing swords again!" he wrote. *—PTI*

Rajeev Chandrasekhar **PHOTO: PTI**

- Rajeev Chandrasekhar has been appointed as Kerala's BJP president. He has previously served as a Union Minister and Rajya Sabha MP from Karnataka

UP girl runs to save books during home demolition

AMBEDKAR NAGAR, 24 MARCH

The video of an eight-year-old girl clutching her books and running away from her shanty during an anti-encroachment drive in Ambedkar Nagar's Jalalpur area, has sparked widespread outrage. The footage, which surfaced on social media, showed an earthmover revving nearby, drawing sharp criticism from opposition parties. Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav condemned the demolition, calling it an example of the state's deteriorating condition. A day earlier, he had posted another message, stating, "In Ambedkar Nagar, a government official is demolishing people's homes to assert his authority, forcing a young girl to run to save her books. These are the same BJP leaders who say Beti Bachao, Beti Padao (Save the daughter, educate the daughter)!" *—PTI*

Woman murdered near DGP office in Andhra

GUNTUR, 24 MARCH

A 33-year-old woman, identified as Lakshmi Tirupatamma, was brutally murdered near the Andhra Pradesh DGP office along the Vijayawada-Guntur National Highway, as reported by police on Monday. The resident of Ranigari Thota in Vijayawada, originally from Pamuru town in Prakasam district, was believed to be a sex worker and had two children. Authorities revealed her throat had been slit, displaying signs of extreme violence, with the crime suspected to have occurred between 7:30 and 8 PM on Sunday. The victim's body was discovered about 300 yards from the highway, on the outskirts of Kolanukonda village. *—PTI*

UP man posts 'I Love You Pakistan', faces FIR

BAREILLY, 24 MARCH

A man has been charged after allegedly posting "I Love You Pakistan" on social media, according to local police. Tabrez Alam, a resident of Shikarpur Chaudhary Gautia, made the controversial post on Facebook, which prompted concerns about national unity from a group named "Akhand Bharat Sankalp Nath Nagari 25." They demanded action, leading to an FIR under Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for actions undermining India's integrity. Additionally, Singh noted that Tabrez was previously accused of abducting a Hindu girl, who allegedly left home with jewellery and cash under his influence. The girl, reportedly taken to Ghaziabad, remains missing, and police are actively searching for her. *—PTI*

Moosewala murder accused moved to Silchar from Punjab

SILCHAR, 24 MARCH

Jagdeep Singh, also known as Jaggu Bhagwanpuria, an accused in the murder of singer Sidhu Moosewala, has been transferred to Silchar Central Jail from Punjab. The Punjab Police relocated him from Bhatinda Jail via a special flight, for his involvement in alleged drug trafficking operations he coordinated from behind bars using mobile phones. Officials revealed that Singh, who has 128 criminal cases against him since 2012—including high-profile murders, extortion, and drug-related offences—had purportedly formed connections with international crime syndicates in Canada, the USA, and Pakistan. He is currently housed in a special cell with heightened security measures implemented around the prison to curb further criminal activities. *—PTI*

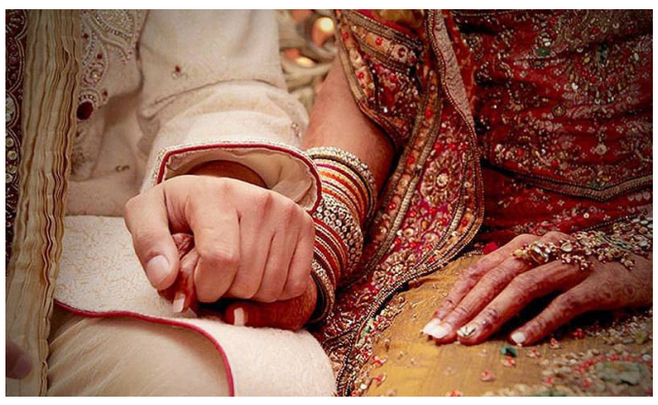
Marriage does not make husband wife's owner: HC

HC refuses to quash case against man for posting wife's pvt video

PRAYAGRAJ, 24 MARCH

Allahabad High Court refused to quash a criminal case against a man accused of uploading an intimate video of himself and his wife on Facebook. The court observed that marriage does not grant a husband ownership or control over his wife, nor does it dilute her autonomy or right to privacy.

Dismissing an application filed for quashing the chargesheet, Justice Vinod Diwakar said, "By uploading an intimate video on Facebook, the applicant (husband) has breached the sanctity of the marital relationship. A husband is expected to honour the trust, faith, and confidence reposed in him by his wife, particularly over their intimate relationship."



A case was filed against Pradumn Yadav by his wife alleging that he made a video of an intimate act performed between them *PHOTO: ANI*

"Sharing such content is violation of confidentiality that defines the bond between husband and wife. This breach of trust undermines the foundation of the marital relationship and is not protected by the marital bond," the court added.

The court further said, "A wife is not an extension of her husband but an individual with her own rights, desires and agency. Respecting her bodily autonomy and privacy is not just a legal obligation but a moral imperative in fostering an equal relationship."

A case was filed against Pradumn Yadav in Mirzapur by his wife alleging that Yadav, without her knowledge and consent, made an obscene video of an intimate act performed between them, firstly uploaded on Facebook and thereafter shared with the cousin of his wife and co-villagers.

Counsel for applicant submitted that the applicant is the legally wedded husband of the complainant and, therefore, no offence has been made. *—PTI*

Nagpur Police Commissioner Ravindra Singal along with other police officials conducts a march as the curfew was lifted after six days of violence, in Nagpur on Sunday *PHOTO: ANI*

'HIGH-HANDEDNESS'

HC raps govt as home of Nagpur rioter demolished

NAGPUR, 24 MARCH

Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court on Monday ordered a stay on the demolition of the houses of two accused, including Fahim Khan, in the violence case, rapping the administration for "high-handedness".

While Khan's two-storey house was razed before the High Court passed the order in the afternoon, authorities halted the demolition of the illegal portions of the other accused Yusuf Sheikh's house following the court's directive.

The duo had moved the high court on Monday against the demolition seeking an urgent hearing.

The bench questioned why the owners of the houses were not given a hearing before demolishing alleged illegal portions.

The bench said if it comes to the conclusion that the demolition was carried out illegally then the authorities would have to pay for the damage caused.

Amid heavy police security, civic authorities on Monday morning demolished Khan's house for unauthorised construction.

Authorities had started removing an illegally constructed portion of Yusuf Sheikh's house in Mahal area, the epicentre of the 17 March violence.

Fahim Khan, a leader of the Minority Democratic Party (MDP), was booked for sedition. He is among over 100 persons arrested for the violence. A few days back, the Nagpur Municipal Corporation had issued a notice to Khan, citing various lapses and the lack of the building plan approval (for his house), sources said. A notice of demolition was given 24 hours prior to the action, the official said. *—PTI*

Prohibitory orders on near Aurangzeb tomb

Prohibitory orders have been imposed in Mahara shtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar amid agitations against Aurangzeb's tomb and to maintain law and order during the upcoming festivals. Police has imposed the prohibitory orders, to be in force from 25 March to 8 April. Several Right-wing organisations have been demanding the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb located in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. The upcoming events ARE Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj's death anniversary (29 March), Gudi Padva festival (30 March), Eid, Jhulelal Jayanti (31 March) and Ram Navami (6 April).

Clashes erupt in Manipur, 2 radicals arrested

IMPHAL, 24 MARCH

Two members of the Meitei radical outfit Arambai Tenggol have been arrested following a violent confrontation with militants from the UNLF (Pambei) in Manipur. The altercation occurred on Saturday when approximately 15-20 Arambai Tenggol members assaulted UNLF militant Irengbam Nandakumar Singh at his residence in Kongpal Chingangbam Leikai. Four UNLF militants sustained blunt force injuries, while both sides exchanged gunfire, prompting a swift response from security forces.

The attackers fled the scene, but in a subsequent operation on Sunday, Kshetrimayum Nikhil Singh (28) and Yumnam Pringanba Singh (23) were taken into custody. Police continue to conduct raids to apprehend additional suspects involved in the clash. Following the incident, security personnel seized weapons and narcotics from an Arambai Tenggol office. *—PTI*

SC sets up task force over students' suicides in institutions

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday took note of the recurring cases of student suicides in higher educational institutions and formed a National Task Force (NTF) to address the mental health concerns of students and prevent such incidents.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan directed Delhi Police to register an FIR on the complaints of the family members of two students who died by suicide while studying at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, in 2023.

The bench emphasised that it is the responsibility of educational institutions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their students. In cases of suicides on campus, the court stated, it is essential for institutions to promptly report to the relevant authorities, asserting that doing so is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative to ensure transparency and accountability.

PHOTO: PTI

The Supreme Court underscored the need for a National Task Force, chaired by former Justice S Ravindra Bhat, to address mental health issues and prevent student suicides in higher education settings. Chief secretaries from all states and union territories have been instructed to nominate officials to assist in these efforts.

The ruling follows an appeal from the parents of the deceased students, challenging the Delhi High Court's previous decision to reject the FIR request. Both students, Ayush Ashna and Anil Kumar, were found dead under distressing circumstances. *—PTI*

SC send contempt plea to M'rashtra over demolition

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Supreme Court has instructed a Maharashtra authority to respond to a man's contempt plea after he and his family faced police action and property demolition for allegedly shouting anti-India slogans during a cricket match. Kitabulla Hamidulla Khan claims that his house and scrap shop were demolished on 24 February, following an FIR against him, his wife, and their 14-year-old son. The plea argues this action violates a Supreme Court ruling requiring a notice and a 15-day response period before demolitions. Khan seeks restoration of his property, compensation, and prosecution of those responsible. *—PTI*

Kerala to launch AI tech hub at Rs 350 cr

T'PURAM, 24 MARCH

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced the establishment of an Emerging Technology Hub in Thiruvananthapuram, spearheaded by the Kerala Startup Mission. With an estimated investment of Rs 350 crore, the hub aims to harness Artificial Intelligence (AI) across critical sectors including agriculture, healthcare, defence, and renewable energy.

In response to a motion by Indian Union Muslim League legislator Manjalamkuzhi Ali, Vijayan revealed that the hub will be located on a three-acre site in Technocity. He also mentioned that the government is drafting an AI policy to support AI-driven software development, innovation initiatives, and startup assistance.

The initiative includes a deep-tech ecosystem, featuring a Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) cluster for entrepreneurs, with an additional allocation of Rs 10 crore to the Kerala Startup Mission.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- The initiative includes a deep-tech ecosystem, featuring a Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) cluster for entrepreneurs.

Moreover, Rs 1 crore has been dedicated to holding a national hackathon on agentic AI, alongside grants for top AI innovations.

The Chief Minister noted the potential for job transformation in the IT sector and highlighted educational efforts to prepare the workforce for future opportunities in AI and data science. *—PTI*

HC withdraws Justice Varma's judicial work amid cash row

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Delhi High Court has announced the immediate withdrawal of all judicial work assigned to Justice Yashwant Varma, following allegations surrounding a substantial cash stash discovered at his official residence after a fire incident. This decision was communicated via a note released on the court's website.

In light of recent developments, the court's division bench-III, formerly chaired by Justice Varma, will have its matters rescheduled by the court master. The note, attributed to the registrar (listing), noted that the withdrawal would remain in place until further notice.

Meanwhile, a plea in the Supreme Court has sought a direction to Delhi Police to lodge an FIR against Varma.

On 22 March, Supreme Court published an inquiry report from Delhi High Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya on its website.

On 22 March, Supreme Court published an inquiry report from Delhi High Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya on its website; Inset: Justice Varma *PHOTO: PTI*

This report included photos and videos regarding the alleged discovery of "four to five semi-burnt sacks of Indian currency notes" from Justice Varma's Lutyens' Delhi residence. Justice Varma has vehemently denied the allegations, asserting that no cash was placed in his storeroom by him or any family member. He described the claims as a "conspiracy to frame and malign him," firmly maintaining his innocence in the matter. *—PTI*

Travel hit after mishap at Gujarat bullet train site

AHMEDABAD, 24 MARCH

A segmental launching gantry used in the construction of a bullet train project near Ahmedabad accidentally skidded from its position late on Sunday, affecting the adjacent railway line and causing significant disruptions to train movement. The incident occurred around 11pm at Vatva, though no casualties or damage to the erected structure were reported, according to the National High-Speed Rail Corporation (NHSRCL).

The mishap resulted in the cancellation of at least 25 trains, with 15 others partially cancelled, five rescheduled, and six diverted, as confirmed by an official from the Ahmedabad railway division.

Efforts to clear the affected railway line were underway, supported by heavy-duty road cranes. In a statement, the NHSRCL noted that senior officials were on-site alongside police and fire services, monitoring the situation. *—PTI*

HORRORS WOMEN SURVIVE

Hyd woman jumps from moving train to escape rape bid

HYDERABAD, 24 MARCH

A 23-year-old woman suffered injuries after jumping from a moving train in Hyderabad when a man allegedly attempted to rape her in the coach, Government Railway Police said on Monday.

The victim, who is undergoing treatment at a hospital, in a statement to police on Sunday said the incident happened on 22 March when she was travelling alone in the ladies coach of the MMTS (Multi Modal Transport Service) train for Medchal from Secunderabad railway station.

The woman said after two female passengers who were travelling in same coach de-boarded the train at Alwal railway station, one unidentified man, aged around 25, came near her and demanded sexual favour and when she refused he tried to force upon her then she jumped from the moving train.

- She sustained bleeding injuries on her head, chin, right hand and on her waist.

She sustained bleeding injuries on her head, chin, right hand and on her waist and later, some passersby got her shifted to a state-run hospital.

Based on the woman's complaint a case under sections 75 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 131 (use of criminal force) of the BNS was registered. *—PTI*

HC asks for case diary, questions CBI in RG Kar rape case

KOLKATA, 24 MARCH

The Calcutta High Court has directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to present the case diary related to its investigation into the rape and murder of an on-duty doctor at RG Kar Hospital during the next hearing on 28 March. Justice Tirthankar Ghosh raised questions about whether the CBI is considering the possibility of gang rape or evidence tampering in its inquiry.

The deceased doctor's parents have requested a court-monitored investigation, citing the CBI's assertion in its chargesheet that a larger conspiracy was involved in the crime. Given the gravity of the case, Justice Ghosh instructed the CBI to clarify its position on the potential for gang rape and to identify any suspects involved.

Sanjay Roy, a former civic volunteer, was arrested by Kolkata Police and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of the doctor, whose body was discovered in the hospital seminar room on 9 August 2024. The high court transferred the case to the CBI following petitions from the victim's family.

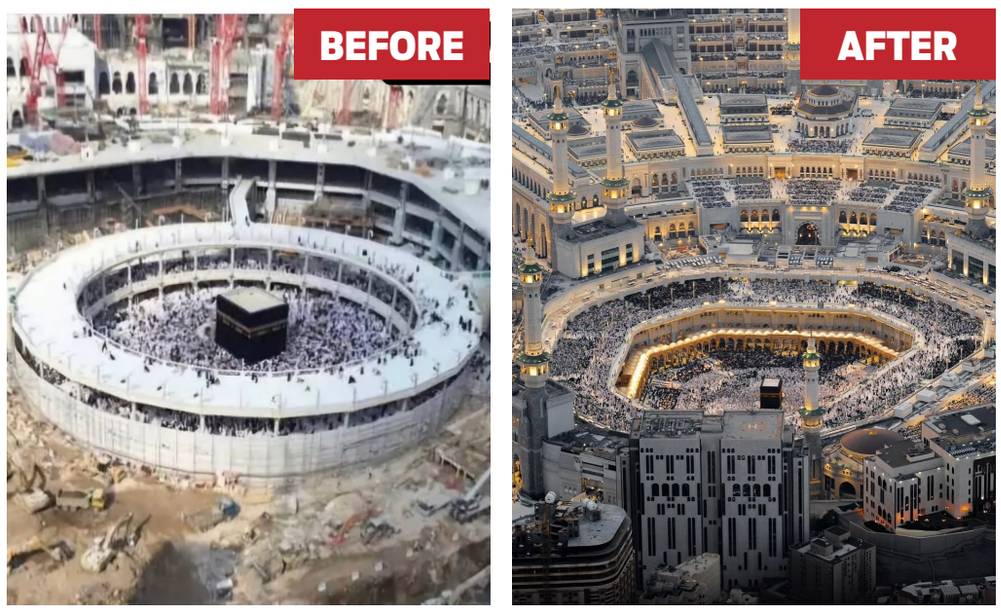
The deceased doctor's parents have requested a court-monitored investigation *PHOTO: X*

During proceedings, the West Bengal government's counsel indicated no objection to further investigation but questioned the legality of probing further after a conviction had taken place. The CBI has been urged to provide a detailed progress report on the investigation. *—PTI*

WORLD'S LARGEST MOSQUE

Masjid al-Haram also known as the Sacred Mosque of Mecca has completed its 15 years of expansion project. It is said to be the largest and most expensive mosque in the world. The project was allocated 40 billion riyas (9071.60 crore). The mosque is best known for the Kaaba, the black cube-shaped building at its centre, which Muslims face during their daily prayers. After undergoing multiple expansions, it can accomadate up to 4 million people

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB @SHAYKH_SUDAIS



US fears espionage after firing of federal employees

President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk work to overhaul the federal government ***PHOTO: PTI***

As President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk work to overhaul the federal government, they're forcing out thousands of workers with insider knowledge and connections who now need a job.

For Russia, China and other adversaries, the upheaval in Washington as Musk's Department of Government Efficiency guts government agencies presents an unprecedented opportunity to recruit informants, national security and intelligence experts say.

Every former federal worker with knowledge of or access to sensitive information or systems could be a target. When thousands of them leave their jobs at the same time, that creates a lot of targets, as well as a counterespionage challenge for the United States.

"This information is highly valuable, and it shouldn't be surprising that Russia and China and other organisations—criminal syndicates for instance—would be aggressively recruiting government employees," said Theresa Payton, a former White House Chief information officer under President George W Bush, who now runs her own cybersecurity firm.

Each year an average of more than 100,000 federal workers leave their jobs. Some retire; others move to the private sector. This year, in three months, the number is already many times higher.

It's not just intelligence officers who present potential security risks. Many departments and agencies oversee vast amounts of data that include personal information on Americans as well as sensitive information about national security and government operations. Exiting employees could also give away helpful security secrets that would allow someone to penetrate government databases or physical offices.

The Office of the US Trade Representative, for instance, maintains information on trade negotiations that could help an adversary undercut the US. Federal records house data on clandestine intelligence operations and agents. Pentagon databases contain reams of sensitive information on US military capabilities. The Department of Energy oversees many of the nation's most closely guarded nuclear secrets.

Only a tiny fraction of the many millions of Americans who have worked for the federal government have ever been accused of espionage.

Background checks, employee training and exit interviews are all designed to prevent informants or moles — and to remind departing federal employees of their duty to preserve national secrets even after leaving federal service.

It takes only one or two misguided or disgruntled workers to cause a national security crisis.

The odds that one angry former employee reaches out to a foreign power go up as many federal employees find themselves without a job, experts said. What's not in doubt is that foreign adversaries are looking for any former employees they can flip. They're hunting for that one informant who could deliver a big advantage for their nation.

Frank Montoya Jr, a retired senior FBI official and former top US government counterintelligence executive, said he was less concerned about well-trained intelligence community employees betraying their oaths and selling out to American adversaries.

But he noted the many workers in other realms of government who could be targeted by Russia or China,

Once military and intelligence officials were the primary targets of foreign spies looking to turn an informant. But now, thanks to the massive amount of information held at many agencies, and the competitive edge it could give China or Russia, that's no longer the case.

The internet has made it far easier for foreign nations to identify and recruit potential informants.

Once, Soviet intelligence officers had to wait for an embittered agent to make contact, or go through the time-consuming process of identifying which recently separated federal employees could be pliable.

Now, all you need is a LinkedIn subscription and you can quickly find former federal officials in search of work.

A foreign spy service or scammer looking to exploit a recently laid-off federal worker could bring in potential recruits by posting a fake job ad online.

One particularly novel concern involves the fear that a foreign agent could set up a fake job interview and hire former federal officials as "consultants" to a fake company.

The former federal workers would be paid for their expertise without even knowing they were supplying information to an enemy. Russia has paid unwitting Americans to do its business before. *—PTI*

SALAR ساڈا

Why was Han Duck-soo reinstated as S Korea PM?

In the latest twist in South Korea's ongoing political crisis, the country's Constitutional Court reinstated Prime Minister Han Duck-soo as acting leader, overturning his impeachment by opposition lawmakers three months ago.

The court's ruling on Monday marks just one front in the deepening turmoil as it simultaneously weighs the far more consequential case of conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, whose December impeachment over his brief but stunning martial law decree has left the country's leadership in limbo for months.

Here's a look at the court's decision and what's ahead:

The Prime Minister typically holds limited authority as the country's second-highest official. But Han, a career bureaucrat who has held various government roles since the 1970s, was elevated as the government's caretaker after South Korea's Opposition-controlled National Assembly impeached Yoon on 14 December.

Yoon's impeachment, triggered by his short-lived imposition of martial law that month, immediately suspended his presidential powers and put his political fate in the hands of the Constitutional Court, which is nearing a decision on whether to formally remove him or reinstate him.

As acting President, Han quickly clashed with the liberal Opposition Democratic Party, mainly over his refusal to comply with their demand to immediately fill three vacant seats on the Constitutional Court's nine-member bench.

The composition of the court is a sensitive issue since removing Yoon from office requires the support of at least six justices, and a full bench would likely increase the chances of his ouster.

Han said he wouldn't appoint the justices without bipartisan consent, but the Democrats accused him of siding with the conservatives in the governing People Power Party, which has been campaigning for Yoon's return to power.

Days after lawmakers impeached Han on 27 December, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, who stepped in as acting President, filled two of the court's vacancies but refused to appoint a progressive justice nominated by the Opposition.

Seven of the court's eight justices overturned or dismissed Han's impeachment, ruling that the accusations against him were either not illegal, not serious enough to warrant his removal or that the impeachment motion had failed to meet the required quorum when it passed through the National Assembly.

After his reinstatement, Han called for national unity and emphasized the need to focus on addressing external challenges stemming from US President Donald Trump's aggressive trade policies.

Han's case is unlikely to serve as a preview of how the court will rule on Yoon. Han played no meaningful role in planning or enforcing Yoon's martial law, which was lifted by a legislative vote just hours after Yoon declared it on the night of 3 Dececember.

But Han's reinstatement still struck a nerve with the Democrats, who have recently criticised the court for its prolonged deliberation on Yoon's case, which has fuelled concerns about a divide among justices, potentially paving the way for Yoon's return.

Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, who narrowly lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon, questioned why the court didn't consider Han's refusal to appoint the justices an impeachable offense. Lee also called for the court to make a swift decision on Yoon.

Yoon's office issued a statement welcoming Han's reinstatement, asserting that the court's decision proved the opposition's "excessive impeachment attempts were reckless, malicious, and politically motivated."

Yoon, who is also facing a separate criminal trial on rebellion charges, stands accused of abusing military power, bypassing constitutional and legal protocols to impose martial law, and orchestrating a failed attempt to dissolve the legislature.

But the Constitutional Court likely won't take a deep dive into Yoon's criminal allegations, as it's only required to rule whether or not he can remain in office.

Some experts say Han's testimony before lawmakers, investigators and the court regarding the short-lived martial law decree could possibly influence how justices rule on Yoon's case.

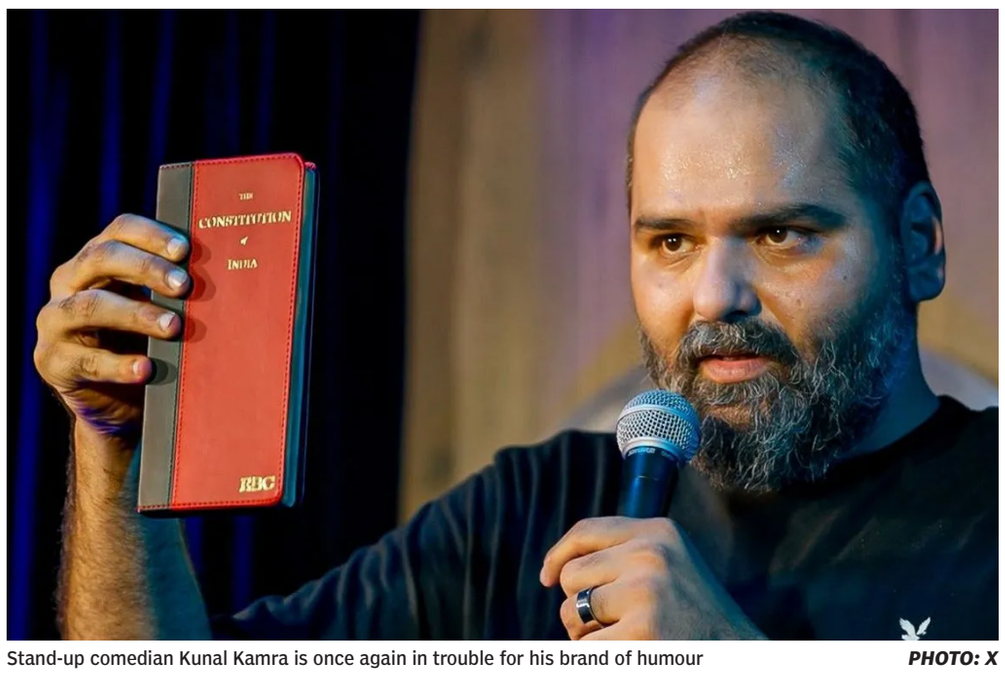
Han and other top officials, including Choi and Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, have said they attempted to talk Yoon out of martial law, citing potential damage to the country's international reputation and economy.

Under South Korea's constitution, such powers can only be exercised during wartime or comparable national emergencies.*—PTI*

Han's reinstatement still struck a nerve with the Democrats, who have recently criticised the court for its prolonged deliberation on Yoon's case ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

Controversy's favourite child Kunal Kamra is in trouble again



Stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra is once again in trouble for his brand of humour ***PHOTO: X***

Stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra, once again in trouble for his brand of humour, could well be controversy's favourite child. On Monday, the comic was at the centre of a massive political storm in Maharashtra for his comments seen as an attempt to defame Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

The 36-year-old pops up in the headlines every now and then, each time for something he has said in his shows or on social media. The issues have ranged from several airlines banning him from flying for heckling a TV news anchor to facing contempt of court for his comments on the judiciary.

Today, too, news cycles were dominated by Kamra, who has reportedly left the state after the row that saw Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis asking him for an apology, Opposition leader Uddhav Thackeray coming to his defence and the venue of his show being vandalised by members of the Shiv Sena.

Kamra has 2.5 million followers on X, one million followers on Instagram and 2.32 million on his YouTube channel. As the row escalated, he posted a photograph on Sunday night of himself with a copy of the Constitution of India and captioned it, "The only way forward..."

He grew up in Mumbai and worked at ad company Corcoise Films as a production assistant for six years often balancing his day job with his stand-up shows that were initially focused on regular issues faced by common people.

In 2017, he grabbed attention with his first stand-up comedy on YouTube where he poked fun at the government for invoking the Army and patriotism when criticised for its policies. Titled "Patriotism & the Government", the video has 18 million views.

The same year, he started a YouTube show titled "Shut Up Ya Kunal" where he would interview personalities from across the spectrum.

The guest list was eclectic, including BJP leader Tejaswi Surya, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, Congress' Sachin Pilot as well as lyricist Javed Akhtar and journalist Ravish Kumar.

The questions were no holds barred with the interviews inserted with memes, photographs and funny videos to draw laughter. The show was a hit but not without its share of controversies.

In 2020, he heckled TV anchor Arnab Goswami aboard a Mumbai-Lucknow IndiGo flight. The video became viral and led IndiGo to suspend Kamra from flying with it for six months. Air India and SpiceJet put him on a no-fly list until further notice.

Kamra found himself at the centre of another scandal that year when he mocked then Chief Justice of India Sharad Arvind Bobde on social media after Goswami was given an interim bail in a 2018 abetment to suicide case.

The post attracted a contempt case against Kamra. An undeterred Kamra made another remark against the Supreme Court, which led to a petition being filed against the comedian in the already pending contempt of court case.

In the same year, Kamra kicked up another controversy by sharing a morphed video of a child singing for Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Germany. The child sang "Hey Janmabhoomi Bharat" but it was replaced with the famous "Peepli Live" song "Mehengayi daayan khaaye jaat hai". The child's NRI father called out Kamra for dragging his child into his politics. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights took cognisance of the incident and asked X and Delhi Police to take down the tweet. Kamra later deleted his tweet.

In 2022, Kamra wrote to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad asking it to denounce Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse to prove that the outfit is pro-Hindu and anti-terrorism.

The comedian said he was ready to give a test to prove his relationship with god but he also wanted to test the organisation whether they were "truly the children of India". This was after Kamra's Gurugram show was cancelled following threats by Bajrang Dal and VHP to disrupt the event.

And just last year, Kamra attracted criticism for his jokes on Bollywood superstar Salman Khan for taking a jibe on the 1999 black buck hunting case and 2002 hit and run case. There were reports that Salman was planning a defamation suit against the comedian.

Ola CEO Bhavish Aggarwal has also been a frequent target of his jokes.Kamra brought him up again in his new show. In the video of the show before a live audience recently, he can be seen modifying the song "Bholi Si Surat" -- from the film "Dil To Pagal Hai" -- to mock Shinde's political career. The video has 1.5 million views and counting.

It led to the auditorium of the Hotel Unicontinental, which houses Habitat Studio where the show was held, being ransacked on Sunday night. Twelve workers of the Shinde-led Shiv Sena. Police also registered a case against 40 Shiv Sena workers for vandalising the Habitat studio in Khar area.

The performance and event venue said it was shutting down. "We are shutting down till we figure out the best way to provide a platform for free expression without putting ourselves and our property in jeopardy. We invite all artists, audience and stakeholders to discuss and share their views free and request your guidance so that we also respect the performers rights." In a previous post on Monday, Habitat Studio issued an apology. *—PTI*

PHOTO: VIDEO GRAB

Usha Vance, Waltz to visit Greenland amid tensions

COPENHAGEN, 23 MARCH

More than a month after US president Donald Trump talked of taking over Greenland, the icy island prepares to receive US Second Lady Usha Vance who will also be accompanied by Trump's national security adviser, Mike Waltz. The visit comes at a time when there is growing anger with the way US is treating the country. Jens – Frederik Neilsen, the leader of Democrats, and expected to be the next Prime Minister accused the US of a 'lack of respect' while planning the visit. Vance will leave on Thursday and return Saturday, a statement from her office said. She and one of her three children will be part of a US delegation that will "visit historic sites" and "learn about Greenlandic heritage". *—PTI*

Heathrow defends response to fire shutdown

LONDON, 24 MARCH

Heathrow bosses on Monday defended their response to a fire that shut down Europe's busiest air hub for almost a day, after Britain's energy system operator suggested the airport had enough electricity from other sources to keep running and had worked to open as "safely and practically possible." The airport in a statement said, "Hundreds of critical systems across the airport were required to be safely powered down and then safely and systematically rebooted. Given Heathrow's size and operational complexity, safely restarting operations after a disruption of this magnitude was a significant challenge." More than 1,300 flights were cancelled on Friday and around 200,000 passengers had journeys disrupted. *—PTI*

Hallelujah! Gelato to celebrate Pope's homecoming

ROME, 23 MARCH

"Hallelujah!" That's what countless Catholics exclaimed as Pope Francis left the hospital Sunday after more than a month fighting pneumonia. It's also the name of a new gelato flavour. Hallelujah gelato made its debut in Rome in open-air kiosks in Piazza Risorgimento Sunday just a 5-minute walk from the Vatican, marking a preview of International Handmade Gelato Day. The tasting attracted hundreds of pilgrims, tourists and gelato lovers eager to sample the divine new flavour that includes gianduia, an Italian combination of roasted hazelnuts and pure chocolate. It will be available in gelato parlors across Europe starting Monday. *—PTI*

Japan wildfires force residents to evacuate in 2 areas

TOKYO, 24 MARCH

Wildfires have hit several regions in western Japan, injuring at least two people, forcing dozens of residents to evacuate and damaging a number of homes as hundreds of firefighters battled the widening blazes in the mountainous areas. The fires in the western towns of Okayama, Imabari and Aso broke out Sunday, quickly burning hundreds of acres. Six homes have been damaged in city of Okayama, where a fire started on Mount Kaigara and burned 600 acres of the forest. In Imabari, in the Ehime prefecture on the main island of Shikoku, the fire left a firefighter slightly injured. Firefighters and defense helicopters sprayed water but the blazes in the two prefectures had not been extinguished as of Monday afternoon. Experts blamed dry weather as likely causes. *—PTI*

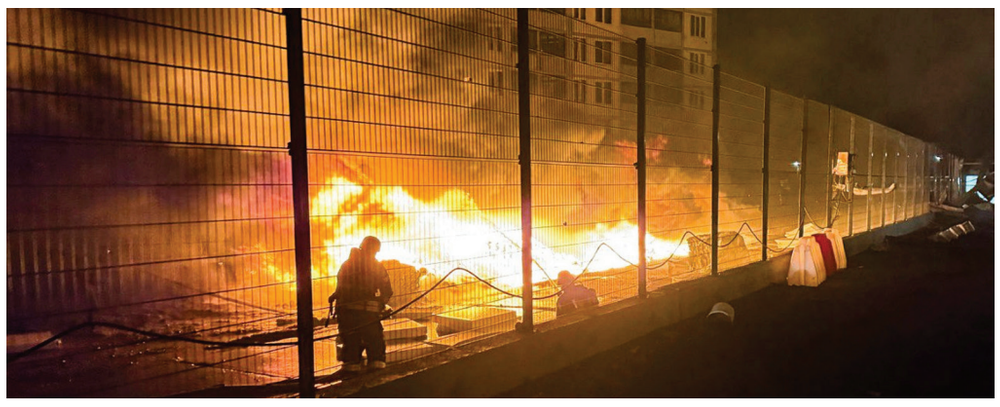
US holds talks with Russia, Kyiv in Saudi

Each side accused the other of undermining efforts to reach pause in the 3-year-old war

KYIV, 23 MARCH

US and Russian negotiators on Monday sat down for talks in Saudi Arabia on a partial ceasefire in Ukraine, hours after a round of negotiations between US and Ukrainian negotiators, Russian news reports said. The state Tass and RIA-Novosti news agencies said the negotiations began in Riyadh and the meeting is expected to be followed by another contact between US and Ukrainian teams.

The separate meetings are set to discuss details of a pause in long-range attacks against energy facilities and civilian infrastructure and a halt on attacks in the Black Sea to ensure safe commercial shipping. Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after US President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders, but the parties have offered different views of what targets would be off-limits to attack.



Firefighters put out the fire following a Russian attack near Kyiv, Ukraine on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

While the White House said "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would also like railways and ports to be protected.

Russia launched a barrage of drones across Ukraine overnight into Sunday that killed at least seven people, including a father and his 5-year-old daughter in Kyiv. "There must be more pressure on Russia to stop this terror. It depends on all our partners - the US, Europe, and others around the world". Zelenskyy said Ukraine is open to a full, 30-day ceasefire that Trump has proposed. Russian President Vladimir Putin has made a complete ceasefire conditional on a halt of arms supplies to Kyiv and a suspension of Ukraine's military mobilisation. *—PTI*

AUSTRIA UNCOVERS RUSSIAN SPIES SPREADING FAKE NEWS ON UKRAINE

VIENNA, 24 MARCH

Austrian authorities said on Monday that they uncovered a Russian-steered campaign aimed at spreading disinformation about Ukraine following the detention in December of a Bulgarian woman whose identity hasn't been released, accused of spying for Russia. Austria's domestic intelligence agency unearthed evidence of the operation as it analyzed devices found in a search of a woman's home the Interior Ministry said in a statement. It said the investigation showed that a few weeks after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a cell working for Russian intelligence was set up and planned a large-scale disinformation campaign in German-speaking countries, particularly Austria. The group was active online but also used stickers and graffiti with content such as far-right symbols and nationalist statements meant to look like pro-Ukrainian activists were responsible for them, according to the Interior Ministry. *—PTI*

US officials have confirmed to multiple outlets that US and UK forces carried out a number of air and missile strikes in Yemen *PHOTO: X*

1 dead as US airstrikes Houthis for the 10th day

DUBAI, 24 MARCH

US airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels pounded sites across the country into Monday, with the group saying the one attack in the capital killed at least one person and wounded more than a dozen others. The American strikes entered its 10th day without a sign of stopping, part of a campaign by US President Donald Trump targeting the rebel group that threatens maritime trade and Israel while also trying to pressure Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor.

So far, the US has not offered any specifics on the sites it is striking, though Trump's national security adviser Mike Waltz claimed the attacks have "taken out key Houthi leadership, including their head missileer." "We've hit their headquarters," Waltz told CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday. "We've hit communications nodes, weapons factories and even some of their over-the-water drone production facilities." So far the Houthis have downplayed their losses and exaggerated their attacks attempting to target American warships, and have targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors in the past 16 months.

The attacks greatly raised the Houthis' profile as they faced economic problems and launched a crackdown targeting any dissent and aid workers at home amid Yemen's decade long stalemated war that's torn apart the Arab world's poorest nation. *—PTI*

Turkey detains scribes as protests intensify

ISTANBUL, 23 MARCH

Turkish authorities continued their crackdown on civilian protestors and journalists, as a media Workers union reported that several journalists were detained from their homes, amidst a wave of street demonstations triggered by the imprisonment of the mayor of Istanbul and top rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In an apparent escalation of the government's response to the growing protests, the Disk-Basin-Is union said at least eight reporters and photojournalists were detained in what it said was an "attack on press freedoms and the people's right to learn the truth".

"You cannot hide the truth by silencing journalists!" the union wrote on the social media platform X, calling for their immediate release amidst deepening concerns about democracy in the country. There was no immediate comment from the authorities concerning the detentions.

Police officers use anti riot rifles and pepper spray to clear protesters during a protest after Istanbul's Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu was arrested and sent to prison, in Istanbul, Turkey *PHOTO: PTI*

On Sunday, a court formally arrested Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu and two district mayors and ordered him jailed pending a trial on corruption charges.The mayor's imprisonment is widely regarded as a political move to remove a major challenger to Erdogan from the next presidential race, currently scheduled for 2028. Government officials strongly reject the accusations and insist that Turkiye's courts operate independently.

- On Sunday, a court arrested Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu and ordered him jailed pending a trial on corruption charges.

Imamoglu was elected mayor of Turkiye's largest city in March 2019, in a major blow to Erdogan and the president's Justice and Development Party, which had controlled Istanbul for a quarter-century. Erdogan's party pushed to void the municipal election results in the city of 16 million, alleging irregularities. The challenge resulted in a repeat of the election a few months later, which Imamoglu also won. *—PTI*

Wickremesinghe says 'no logic' in renegotiating Adani project

COLOMBO, MAR 24

Amidst Sri Lanka's economic crisis its former president Ranil Wickremesinghe has criticised President Anura Kumara Dissanayake-led government for failing to move ahead with India's Adani Group's Renewable Energy Project in Mannar. Wickremesinghe made these remarks during a televised discussion on Saturday the text of which was released on Monday.

He also stressed the need for Sri Lanka to enhance economic cooperation with India to maximise results for the island nation. Wickremesinghe said during his two-year term in 2022, he emphasised a South India-focused economic framework in areas of renewable energy, agriculture, and trade links.

Ranil Wickremesinghe *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

"I explored many avenues for economic cooperation with India. Regrettably, the current government has failed to pursue the Adani renewable project in Mannar." He criticised them for failing to move ahead with the Renewable Energy Project in Mannar with Indian conglomerate, Adani. He said he saw no logic in the NPP government's attempt to renegotiate the Adani green energy project."This would adversely affect all Indian investments," Wickremesinghe said. The company was to invest a total of USD 1 billion in generating electricity from wind at two projects and laying transmitting lines to take it to users. The plan came under the scrutiny of the newly elected administration under President Dissanayake who wanted to reduce electricity costs. The NPP in the run-up to last year's presidential election said it would cancel the Adani renewable project in the north-eastern region. *—PTI*

Israel strikes Gaza's largest hospital, Egypt offers new peace deal

Smoke rises from a building after it was targeted by an Israeli army strike, in Gaza *PHOTO: PTI*

DEIR AL-BALAH, 24 MARCH

Israel's military struck the largest hospital in southern Gaza on Sunday night, killing two people, wounding others and causing a large fire, the territory's Health Ministry said even as Egypt made a new proposal to get the ceasefire back on track.

The strike hit the surgical building of Nasser Hospital in the city of Khan Younis, the ministry said, days after the facility was overwhelmed with dead and wounded when Israel resumed the war in Gaza last week with a surprise wave of airstrikes. Those killed in Sunday night's strike included a 16-year-old boy who underwent surgery two days ago, according to the Health Ministry. Also killed was Ismail Barhoum, a member of Hamas' political bureau, who was being treated at the hospital, Hamas said in a statement.

- The strike hit the surgical building of Nasser Hospital.

Israel's military confirmed the strike on the hospital, blaming civilian deaths on Hamas because it operates in densely populated areas. Meanwhile Egyptian official said its proposal for ceasefire was welcomed by Hamas wherein it would release five living hostages including an American-Israeli in return for allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza and release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. News reports from Tel Aviv also indicate rising civilian protests against its President Benjamin Netanyahu who has been moving to dismiss top legal and security officials. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Euro startup set to launch orbital rocket on 1st test flight

OSLO, 24 MARCH

A private European aerospace company is set to make the first test flight of its orbital launch vehicle from Norway on Monday. The launch window for its Spectrum rocket from the island of Andøya in northern Norway is 12.30pm to 3.30pm local time, said Isar Aerospace, which is headquartered in Munich. The company said it may conduct the test flight later in the week. The 28-metre Spectrum is a two-stage launch vehicle designed for small and medium-sized satellites.

The company largely rules out the possibility of the rocket reaching orbit on its first complete flight, saying it would consider a 30-second flight a success. Isar Aerospace aims to collect as much data and experience as possible on the first integrated test of all the systems on its in-house-developed launch vehicle. The startup, which raised more than 400 million euros in capital, hopes to build up to 40 launch vehicles per year in a plant outside of Munich. The vehicles are to be used for putting satellites into orbit. *—PTI*

K DRAMA GETS INTENSE

S Korea's PM reinstated as Prez after impeachment overturned

SEOUL, 24 MARCH

South Korea's Constitutional Court overturned the impeachment of Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, reinstating the nation's No 2 official as acting leader Monday while not yet ruling on the separate impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol over his shocking imposition of martial law late in December.

Many observers said the 7-1 ruling in Han's case did not signal much about the upcoming verdict on Yoon, as Han wasn't a key figure in imposing martial law. But the ruling could still embolden Yoon's staunch supporters and ramp up their political offensive on the opposition.

- After being reinstated, Han called for national unity and promised to focus on urgent matters, including Trump's aggressive tariffs.

Speaking with reporters after his reinstatement, Han thanked the court for making "a wise decision" and promised to focus on tackling "urgent matters," including a fast-changing global trade environment, in an apparent reference to the Trump administration's aggressive tariffs policy. He also called for national unity, saying: "There's no left or right - what matters is the advancement of our nation."

South Korea has been thrown into huge political turmoil, since Yoon, a conservative, declared martial law on 3 December and sent hundreds of troops to the liberal-controlled National Assembly and other places in Seoul. Yoon's decree lasted only six hours as enough lawmakers managed to enter an assembly hall and voted it down quickly. The assembly impeached Yoon on 14 December making Han acting president who was again impeached late December.

Han was accused in the impeachment motion of abetting Yoon's martial law declaration and obstructing efforts to restore the Constitutional Court's full membership and investigate Yoon's alleged rebellion.

The unprecedented, successive impeachments intensified domestic division and deepened worries about the country's diplomatic and economic activities. Seven of the Constitutional Court's eight justices ruled to overturn Han's impeachment saying the accusations against him weren't serious enough to remove him from office. *—PTI*

Many observers said the 7-1 ruling in Han's case did not signal much about the upcoming verdict on Yoon *PHOTO: PTI*

Gold plunges Rs 700 to Rs 90,550 per 10g

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Gold prices plunged Rs 700 to Rs 90,550 per 10g in national capital on Monday amid persistent selling by jewellers and stockists, according to All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity had finished at Rs 91,250 per 10g on Friday. Falling for third day in a row, prices of 99.5 per cent purity declined by Rs 700 to Rs 90,100 per 10g from Rs 90,800 per 10g. "Gold prices retreated from record highs as geopolitical risks eased following discussions between Ukraine and the US on Sunday, exploring a potential peace deal with Russia," Chintan Mehta, Chief Executive Officer at Abans Financial Services, said. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Rupee recovers its 2025 losses, closes at 85.67 against USD

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Rising for the seventh straight session, the rupee appreciated 31 paise to close at 85.67 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, wiping off all its losses in 2025, supported by a positive trend in domestic equity markets and fresh foreign capital inflows. This is the seventh straight session of gain for the rupee, during which it has added 154 paise. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.93, then touched an intraday high of 85.49 and a low of 86.01 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.67 (provisional), registering a gain of 31 paise from its previous closing level. The local unit has recovered all its losses for 2025. On 31 December, 2024, the rupee closed at 85.64 against the greenback. —*PTI*

L&T, John Cockerill to explore green power tech

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Infrastructure major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Monday said its wholly-owned arm L&T Energy Green Tech Ltd (LTEGL) has entered into a pact with John Cockerill for exploring specific green power technologies. The Memorandum of Understanding aims to identify and develop strategic collaboration opportunities in manufacturing, component supply and engineering solutions critical to the implementation and deployment of Concentrated Solar Power and Thermal Energy Storage projects. "Our collaboration with John Cockerill marks a significant step in this direction, combining L&T's end-to-end expertise in manufacturing, EPC and services with John Cockerill's global leadership in energy," Subramanian Sarma, Director and President, L&T said. LTEGL offers integrated solutions across the green energy value chain.—*PTI*

Amazon to charge zero referral fee on Rs 300 products

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

E-commerce major Amazon India on Monday announced zero referral fees on over 1.2 crore products on its platform that are priced below Rs 300. "By eliminating referral fees on crores of products and reducing shipping costs, we're making it more lucrative for sellers to sell on Amazon.in," Amit Nanda, Director, Selling Partner Services, Amazon India, said. The zero referral fees would be applicable across 135 product categories like apparel, shoes, fashion jewellery, grocery, home décor and furnishings, beauty, toys, kitchen products, automotive, and pet products among others. Referral fees are a commission that sellers pay to Amazon for each product sold. Amazon has also introduced a new flat rate for sellers using external fulfilment services like Easy Ship and Seller Flex. —*PTI*

Sensex jumps 1,078 points to settle at 6-week high

FIIs inflows bought equities worth Rs 7,470.36 crore

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

The NSE Nifty surged by 307.95 points or 1.32 per cent to 23,658.35. Intra-day, the benchmark zoomed 358.35 points or 1.53 per cent to 23,708.75 PHOTO: PTI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty surged more than 1 per cent on Monday amid fresh foreign fund inflows and buying in banking and oil & gas shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,078.87 points or 1.40 per cent to settle at over six-week high of 77,984.38. During the day, it zoomed 1,201.72 points or 1.56 per cent to 78,107.23.

The NSE Nifty surged by 307.95 points or 1.32 per cent to 23,658.35. Intra-day, the benchmark zoomed 358.35 points or 1.53 per cent to 23,708.75.

A positive trend in the US and European markets powered the rally in domestic equities, experts said.

From the Sensex pack, NTPC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, State Bank of India, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank, HCL Tech, Reliance Industries and Bajaj Finance were the biggest gainers.

Titan, IndusInd Bank, Zomato, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Nestle and Infosys were the laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 7,470.36 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

In the six-day rally to Monday, Sensex has zoomed more than 4,100 points or 5 per cent as FII selling eased. Broader Nifty has climbed 1,260 points or 5.5 per cent since 17 March.

"Renewed optimism by foreign investors coupled with strong US and European market cues further bolstered the sentiment," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled higher while Seoul and Tokyo ended lower. European markets were trading in positive territory. US markets ended in green on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude went up 0.07 per cent to USD 72.21 a barrel. —*PTI*

$10 BILLION EVALUATION

Meesho gears up for $1B IPO, outpaces Flipkart

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Indian e-commerce platform Meesho is reportedly preparing to go public later this year, planning to raise USD 1 billion through an initial public offering (IPO). Meesho has also reportedly chose Morgan Stanley, Kotak and Citi as its advisers for the IPO.

Bankers and experts have pitched a valuation for Meesho to the tune of USD 10 billion. The company had valued itself at USD 3.9 billion in 2024, making it a more than double increase, if Meesho goes ahead with the valuation.

Meesho will then join a list of Indian start-ups such as PhysicsWallah (PW), Ather and Lenskart seeking a valuation that is significantly higher than what they commanded during their private market fundraises.

If Meesho does list itself, it would outpace major competitor Flipkart, who had earlier said it was planning for market debut and was waiting for its parent company, Walmart, to decide on the timeline for the IPO.

Entering in 2015, Meesho has grown in size and scale and improved its profit profile despite competing against well-funded rivals such as Flipkart and Amazon.

While Flipkart is the market leader in the, Meesho has gained prominence over the years and grown its market share massively by focussing on Tier 3 and beyond regions. —*Agencies*

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The share of private capital expenditure (capex) in India's Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) has dropped to a ten-year low of 33 per cent in FY2024, according to a report by ICRA.

The report highlighted that while listed companies have increased their capex spending, a decline in investments by unlisted entities has led to an overall slowdown in private sector capital investments. As per report, GFCF, which includes the gross addition to fixed assets and intangibles, forms about 30 per cent of India's nominal GDP. It is the second-largest component after private final consumption expenditure.

Over the past decade, GFCF has grown at a compounded annual growth rate of 10 per cent. However, this growth has slowed down in recent years, with GFCF growth moderating to 9 per cent in FY2024 from a strong 20 per cent in FY2023.

The report pointed out that while the government's capex push and household investments in real estate supported GFCF growth in FY2024, private capex remained weak.

Despite this overall decline, listed companies have continued to increase their capex. Their investments grew by 28 per cent in FY2023 and 12 per cent in FY2024. However, they account for only 16 per cent of total private sector corporate capex and 5 per cent of overall domestic capex.

Post-Covid, corporate cash generation has consistently improved .—*ANI*

India's private sector output growth continues: HSBC PMI

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

PHOTO: FREEPIK

India's private sector continued its strong growth momentum in March, though at a slightly slower pace compared to February, according to the latest HSBC Flash India PMI data.

The HSBC Flash India Composite Output Index, which tracks the month-on-month change in the output of the country's manufacturing and service sectors, declined marginally from 58.8 in February to 58.6 in March.

Despite this slight dip, the latest reading remained well above its long-run average of 54.7, indicating a sharp expansion in business activity. The slowdown was primarily due to a softer increase in services activity, while factory production picked up significantly, growing at the fastest pace since July 2024.

The manufacturing sector showed strong improvement, with the HSBC Flash India Manufacturing PMI rising from 56.3 in February to 57.6 in March. This indicates a notable enhancement in operating conditions, aligning closely with the average for the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Among the five key components of the manufacturing index, three--output, new orders, and stocks of purchases--saw growth compared to the previous month.

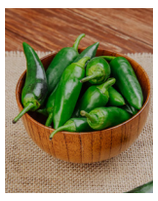
Price trends, however, showed mixed signals. Input costs increased at a sharp and accelerated rate, but the rate of inflation in output prices eased to its lowest level in over three years.

Overall, India's private sector ended the 2024/25 fiscal year on a solid note, with sustained growth in new business orders and output.

While the rate of expansion slowed from February, it remained well above long-term trends. —*ANI*

GI-TAGGED SIKKIM CHILLY EXPORTED TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH



A consignment of GI-tagged Dalle Chilly from Sikkim has been shipped to the Solomon Islands, an official statement said on Monday.

Dalle Chilly, also known as Fire Ball Chilly or Dalle Khursani, is renowned for its intense pungency, bright red colour, and high nutritional value (vitamins A, C, and E, along with potassium).

"Through its extensive procurement network, Mevedir sourced about 15,000 kg of fresh Dalle Chilly from farmers and Farmer Producer Organizations in South Sikkim. This consignment ensured farmers received a premium price of Rs 250-300 per kg, compared to the usual Rs 180-200 per kg," the commerce ministry said. —*PTI*

India's tech start-ups raised $2.5B funding in 2025: Tracxn

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

India's tech start-ups raised USD 2.5 billion in the first quarter of 2025, marking a 13.64 per cent increase over the previous quarter and an 8.7 per cent rise from the year-ago period, a feat that secured its spot as the third most-funded country globally after the US and UK, according to a report by market intelligence platform Tracxn.

Late-stage ventures raked in total funding of USD 1.8 billion in Q1 2025, an increase of 38.46 per cent compared to Q4 2024. Seed stage start-ups saw total funding of USD 157 million in Q1 2025, a drop of 23.79 per cent compared to Q4 2024. Early-stage start-ups saw a total funding of USD 528 million in Q1 2025, a drop of 23.7 per cent compared to Q4 2024.

Sectors such as Auto Tech, Enterprise Applications, and Retail are attracting investor interest, and the rise in acquisitions signals a maturing market, Neha Singh, Co-Founder of Tracxn said.

Delhi-based firms accounted for 40 per cent of all funding seen by tech companies across India, followed by Bengaluru, 21.6 per cent. —*PTI*

ACTIS ACQUIRES STRIDE CLIMATE INVESTMENTS

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Sustainable infrastructure investor Actis on Monday said it has acquired 100 per cent stake in Stride Climate Investments in India. As per the deal, Actis will take charge of Stride's 371M portfolio of operating solar PV assets spread across 21 projects in 7 states, majority in Gujarat. The acquisition size was not disclosed by the company.

Actis has deployed more than USD 7.1 billion in Asia since inception across different strategies and, as a leading energy investor, has built or operated more than 8 GW of installed capacity in the region, including more than 5.5 GW of renewables. Stride is the third energy generation platform in India acquired by Actis after BluPine Energy and Athena Renewables.—*PTI*

India's Gen AI boom to drive data centre demand: Report

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

India's Generative Artificial Intelligence (gen AI) sector is expected to witness strong growth over the next five years, creating a surge in demand for data centres, says a report by ANAROCK.

The report highlighted that as per industry estimates, market size of Gen AI in India is projected to grow from USD 1.1 billion in 2025 to USD 6.4 billion in 2030, expanding at a compound annual growth rate of 42 per cent.

As AI-driven applications become more advanced, data centre operators are re-evaluating their strategies to accommodate the increased infrastructure needs. The growing demand for computing power, storage, and efficient data management is pushing the expansion of data centres across the country. As gen AI moves towards real-time applications, low-latency processing will become crucial. This will lead to a rise in edge data centres to bring computing closer to users and reduce processing delays.

The demand for edge data centres will see significant growth, especially in Tier-II cities These facilities will help process data closer to users, improving speed and efficiency for AI-driven applications. —*ANI*

DRIVEN BY SUPER RICH

Luxury real estate booms with demand surge

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The sector is not only outperforming expectations but is on track to deliver its 3rd consecutive record breaking year in sales PHOTO: PTI

India's luxury real estate market is witnessing rapid growth, driven by strong demand from high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs), non-resident Indian (NRI) investors, and domestic buyers looking to invest in premium properties.

According to a report by GRI Club, an international real estate company, the sector is outperforming expectations and is set to record its third consecutive year of unprecedented sales.

"The sector is not only outperforming expectations but is on track to deliver its third consecutive record-breaking year in sales. In the top seven cities, total residential sales in 2024 are projected to exceed INR 5.1 trillion, with more than 300,000 units sold," it said.

The report said that cities such as Mumbai, Gurgaon, and Bangalore have seen particularly high demand for ultra-luxury residences, with absorption rates reaching new heights. The trend reflects a growing preference among buyers for high-end, amenity-rich homes that offer exclusivity and lifestyle features.

Apart from individual buyers, family offices and institutional investors are also expanding their investments in luxury real estate. Many are channeling funds into structured real estate investments and alternative financial instruments, viewing luxury properties as a stable and appreciating asset class, especially amid stock market fluctuations.

The report said "Many of these investors are deploying capital into structured real estate funds and alternative investment vehicles, viewing luxury properties as a stable, appreciating asset class amid stock market volatility. NRIs, in particular, are playing a key role in this expansion".

For many NRIs, luxury real estate in India is seen as a long-term wealth preservation strategy, aligning with global investment patterns. Indian investors are also showing a strong interest in luxury properties abroad, particularly in Dubai and the UK. —*ANI*

IL&FS Engineering receives showcause notice

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

IL&FS Engineering Services on Monday said it has received a showcause notice from Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) for reviewing the classification of the company's loan account as a suspicious fraud account.

Facilities involved for Rs 123 crore, though irregularities have not been quantified by the lender, IL&FS Engineering said in a regulatory filing.

This was first observed by Grant Thornton India in their forensic audit report and was duly reported to MCA for appropriate action, it said.

As per the directions of NCLT on 1 October, 2018, the reconstituted Audit Committee of new Board comprising nominated directors of Ministry of Corporate Affairs had conducted a special audit for all high-value transactions undertaken by IL&FS Ltd (IL&FS) and a few of its group companies which included IL&FS Engineering through Grant Thornton India LLP, it said.

The then loan accounts, maintained with various secured lenders including IOB by the company, being a subsidiary of IL&FS were classified as fraud, it said.

The company's liabilities to all secured lenders including IOB are being addressed as part of the ongoing group resolution framework approved by the NCLAT and currently being implemented, under the supervision of Retired Supreme Court Judge - Justice DK Jain, by the government-appointed new public board, it said. —*PTI*

NZ beat New Caledonia 3-0, qualify for 2026 WC

AUCKLAND, 24 MARCH

New Zealand will play at 2026 World Cup after beating New Caledonia 3-0 on Monday in the final of Oceania confederation qualifying series. New Zealand "All Whites" reached World Cup for 3rd time after qualifying in Spain in 1982 and South Africa in 2010. They join hosts Canada, US, Mexico and Japan, which became the first team to qualify for 48-team tournament. New Caledonia still has a chance to qualify through a six-team inter-continental playoff involving teams from Asian, African, North and Central American and South American confederations. New Zealand had a setback when its captain, Chris Wood, was forced from the field with a hip injury. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

Mexico win CONCACAF title, beat Panama 2-1

INGLEWOOD (US), 24 MARCH

Raúl Jiménez scored his second goal on penalty kick in second minute of second-half stoppage time, and Mexico beat Panama 2-1 to win CONCACAF Nations League tournament for the first time. Jiménez, the 33-year-old Fulham striker, dominated the week at SoFi Stadium with all four of Mexico's goals in El Tri's two matches. After he scored on a header in eighth minute against Panama on Sunday, he used a stutter-step approach before perfectly striking a penalty awarded when defender José Córdoba touched the ball with his inexplicably outstretched arm while chasing after it in 90th minute. This tournament is the latest chapter in the comeback story of Jiménez, who had a serious head injury in 2020. *—PTI*

Sanjay Kumar Singh elected to UWW-Asia bureau

AMMAN, 24 MARCH

Sanjay Kumar Singh, President of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), has been elected as a bureau member of United World Wrestling (UWW)-Asia during the UWW-Asia General Assembly held in Amman. The election took place just a day prior to the commencement of the Asian Championship. "This is not just a personal milestone but a testament to the growth and recognition of Indian wrestling at the global level," Singh said. He expressed eagerness to collaborate with UWW-Asia to promote and develop the sport. Singh garnered 22 votes out of 38, reflecting support from the Asian wrestling community, marking a significant achievement for Indian wrestling on international stage. *—PTI*

Hero's welcome for new IOC Prez Kirsty in Zimbabwe

HARARE, 24 MARCH

Newly elected International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry returned to Zimbabwe to a jubilant reception, marking a significant national achievement. As the first woman and first African to lead the IOC, the 41-year-old sports minister triumphed against six competitors in Greece. Amid traditional African performances at Harare airport, Coventry expressed that her victory is a collective success: "We broke down barriers." Praise for her achievement echoed through the crowd, with Abigail Madera, a boxing referee, noting the importance of having a woman in such a prominent role. While respected for her Olympic achievements, Coventry's ministerial role has faced scrutiny over the government's human rights record. She plans to resign from her ministerial position to relocate to Lausanne as her eight-year IOC term begins in June. *—PTI*

Delhi Capitals' bowler Mitchell Starc celebrates with teammates after the wicket of Lucknow Super Giants' batter Nicholas Pooran during the Indian Premier League 2025 match between Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants, at ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

Pooran, Marsh take LSG to 209 vs Capitals

Kuldeep, Starc help Capitals apply the breaks

VISAKHAPATNAM, 24 MARCH

Delhi Capitals staged a strong comeback after Nicholas Pooran (75) and Mitchell Marsh's (72) blitz to restrict Lucknow Super Giants to a sub-par 209 for 8 in their Indian Premier League contest, on Monday.

With no assistance off the pitch, LSG openers went off the blocks quickly with Marsh bludgeoning half dozen of sixes and an equal number of boundaries, for a 21-ball fifty; his fastest in the format. Pooran dazzled with his stunning strokeplay to make 75 off only 30 balls with 7 sixes and 6 fours.

LSG appeared set for a total in excess of 240 at one stage, but riding on a splendid spell from Kuldeep Yadav (4-0-20-2) and Mitchell Starc's 3/42, Capitals applied brakes on their opponent's charge. Kuldeep varied his pace and used flighted deliveries leaving the batters in two minds.

LSG, who were cruising at 133 for one in the 12th over, staggered through the second half to add only 76 runs in the last eight overs while losing six wickets.

Marsh took charge early on to 21 runs off the third over from compatriot Starc to make intentions clear. On a placid track, Marsh made merry as he connected with sheer power and timing to leave Delhi scrambling for answers as each of his stroke appeared to have brought desired results.

Even as Vipraj Nigam provided a breakthrough in form of Aiden Markram (15) inside the powerplay, there was no let-up for the Capitals as LSG raised to their second fastest team 100 in 8.1 overs.

A pivotal moment in the innings arrived in the seventh over when Sameer Rizvi spilled a simple catch to give Pooran a reprieve, off Nigam while fielding at backward point. *—PTI*

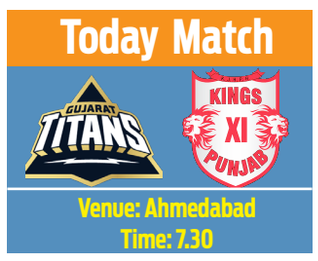
IYER AIMS TO LEAVE A MARK AS PK FACES GT

AHMEDABAD, 24 MARCH

Skipper Shreyas Iyer will lean on his captaincy credentials as he looks to turn around the fortunes of perennial underperformers Punjab Kings in this IPL, opening the season with a clash against Gujarat Titans on Tuesday. Iyer enjoyed huge success leading Kolkata Knight Riders to the IPL title last year, four years after guiding Delhi Capitals to the 2020 IPL final, and now faces the challenge of ending Punjab's 18-year-long wait for their maiden IPL title.

The Punjab team reached the semi-finals in 2018 and made it to the final once in 2014, but despite numerous squad changes and leadership shifts, they have failed to break into the top five in the last four editions, even after rebranding to Punjab Kings from Kings XI Punjab.

With Iyer at the helm, Punjab has a captain with proven leadership credentials. He will also reunite with coach Ricky Ponting at Punjab. Iyer finished as India's top run-scorer in the Champions Trophy with 243 runs in five games, while Shubman Gill also struck a century in the opening match against Bangladesh and contributed significantly to India's triumph. *—PTI*



Harmanpreet, Mandhana, Deepti retained in highest category of BCCI central contracts **PHOTO: PTI**

BCCI announces women's contracts

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

India women's team captain Harmanpreet Kaur, her deputy Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma were retained in Grade A, the highest category of central contracts offered by BCCI on Monday.

Fast bowler Renuka Thakur, batter Jemimah Rodrigues, wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh, and opener Shafali Verma have been placed in the 'Grade B' category. Shafali has maintained her position even after being removed from the white-ball squad due to poor performances in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2024 in the UAE. Left-arm orthodox bowler Rajeshwari Gaikwad, who was in Grade B last year, didn't find a place this season.

Young off-spinner Shreyanka Patil, fast bowlers Titas Sadhu and Arundhati Reddy, all-rounder Amanjot Kaur and wicketkeeper Uma Chetry have got their first central contracts as they have been included in Grade C alongside Yastika Bhatia, Radha Yadav, Amanjot Kaur, Uma Chetry, Sneh Rana and Pooja Vastrakar.

Meghna Singh, Devika Vaidya, Sabbineni Meghana, Anjali Sarvani, and Harleen Deol, however, missed out.

A woman cricketer in the A category earns Rs 50 lakh over and above match fee and Rs 30 lakh and Rs 10 lakh are allotted for B and C categories respectively.

India will face Sri Lanka and South Africa in an ODI tri-nation series in Sri Lanka, which is scheduled to begin on 27 April. The ICC Women's Championship 2022-25 second-place finishers are also preparing for the ICC Women's World Cup 2025, which is due to take place on home ground later in the year. *—ANI/PTI*

2019 World Championships silver medallist Deepak Punia, who missed a medal at Tokyo Olympics, did not qualify for the Games **PHOTO: PTI**

Time for Antim, Punia to press restart button

AMMAN, 24 MARCH

- Embroiled in bitter selection trials between 2022-23, young Antim made a heartbreaking exit from the Paris Olympics. Two-time U20 world champion ended up being a pale shadow of herself in the 53kg

After a forgettable 2024 season, the senior Asian Championships, beginning on Monday, will provide an opportunity to Antim Panghal and Deepak Punia to make a fresh beginning. Other Indian wrestlers too will have a chance to carve out their own identity at the international level.

Embroiled in bitter selection trials between 2022-23, young Antim made a heartbreaking exit from the Paris Olympics. The two-time U20 world champion ended up being a pale shadow of herself in the 53kg.

Much would be expected from the U23 world champion Reetika Hooda (76kg) and U17 world champion Mansi Lather, who came through the 68kg selection trials, and Manisha Bhanwala (62kg).

The 2019 World Championships silver medallist Deepak Punia, who missed a medal at Tokyo Olympics by a whisker, did not qualify for the Games.

He has been struggling for form of late. Someone who excelled at the junior level but could not repeat the success at the senior level, Deepak would aim to shrug off the past disappointments. He will present his challenge in the 92kg category.

Without Paris Games bronze medalist Aman Sehrawat, U23 world champion Chirag will be looking to make in the event. Udit (61kg) and world U20 medallist Sujeet Kalkal (65kg) are the other promising prospects in the Indian squad. *—PTI*

PCB CEO blames ICC for mismanagement of CT final

LAHORE, 23 MARCH

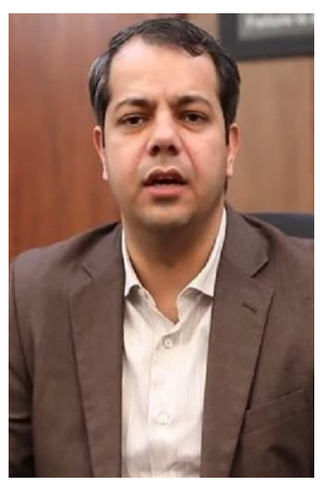
The chief operating officer of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Sumair Ahmed, has held the International Cricket Council (ICC) responsible for the mismanagement during the final presentation ceremony of the Champions Trophy in Dubai. Notably, no representative from Pakistan was called to the podium, despite Ahmed's presence at the venue.

Speaking at a function in Lahore, Ahmed stated, "It was a result of mismanagement on the part of the ICC, and everyone knows who's involved in it. We did not take the matter in a positive way."

He confirmed that he travelled to Dubai at the direction of PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi and expressed dissatisfaction with the ICC's inadequate response to their request for an explanation.

At the presentation, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia and New Zealand Cricket's CEO Roger Twose were on stage alongside BCCI president Roger Binny and ICC chairman Jay Shah, while Pakistan went unrepresented.

Ahmed also noted that the upgraded Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore experienced roof leaks during the rain-delayed match between Australia and Afghanistan, attributing the issue to the contractor responsible for renovating the stadium. *—PTI*



Sumair Ahmed **PHOTO: PTI**

India, B'desh set for football showdown

SHILLONG, 24 MARCH

On Tuesday, 25 March, India will meet Bangladesh for the 29th time in international football, a rivalry steeped in passion. The Blue Tigers, who have historically dominated, boast 14 wins compared to Bangladesh's four, with 10 matches ending in draws, according to the AIFF Media Team.

The last encounter, during the 2021 SAFF Championship, ended in a 1-1 draw, with Indian captain Sunil Chhetri scoring. He has netted six of India's last seven goals against Bangladesh, who have not claimed victory since 2003. Defender Sandesh Jhingan acknowledged that matches against Bangladesh are intense, highlighting the competitive spirit of both sides.

India, currently ranked 126th by FIFA, aims for qualification for the Asian Cup for the third consecutive time. Bangladesh, ranked 185th, has qualified only once before in 1980, making this a crucial match in their quest for advancement. Key players for Bangladesh include Javed Bhuyan and former England youth international Hamza Choudhury, who recently switched allegiances to represent his mother's birth country. *—ANI*

KIPG: Rubina Francis, Swaroop Mahavir Unhalkar miss gold

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

On Day 3 of the Khelo India Para Games 2025 shooting competition at Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range, Paralympians Rubina Francis and Swaroop Mahavir Unhalkar faced unexpected defeats.

Rubina, who had previously medalled at the Paris 2024 Paralympics, lost the women's 10m air pistol SH1 event to Uttar Pradesh's Sumedha Pathak, with scores of 237.5 and 223.6, respectively. Anita Kumari of Jammu and Kashmir secured the bronze with a score of 208.5. Sumedha, who has overcome a spinal cord injury, expressed her joy at winning the gold.

Rubina Francis and Swaroop Mahavir Unhalkar were denied gold medals on Sunday. **PHOTO: PTI**

In the mixed 10m air rifle prone SH1 event, Maharashtra's Unhalkar was bested by state mate Sagar Balasaheb Katale, who clinched gold with 251.3. Rajasthan's Mona Agarwal took silver with 250.9, while Unhalkar finished in eighth place.

Rubina, having previously secured gold, expressed disappointment but acknowledged her efforts in the face of personal challenges. Both athletes praised the Khelo India initiative. *—PTI*

JAB AT JOFRA ARCHER

Harbhajan flayed for racist 'kaali taxi' remark

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Former India spinner, Harbhajan Singh faced severe criticism for making comparing English pacer Jofra Archer to a 'kaali taxi' on air during Rajasthan Royal's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday.

"London me kaali taxi ka meter tez bhaagta hai, Aur yaha pe Archer sahab ka meter bhi tez bhaaga hai (Like the meter of London's black taxis, Archer's meter has also been on the higher side)," Harbhajan said during the 18th over of the first innings when SRH batter Heinrich Klaasen smashed the Rajasthan spearhead for consecutive fours.

The comment triggered an uproar on social media, with many demanding the immediate removal of Harbhajan from the IPL commentary panel. The Turbanator, however, hasn't yet issued a clarification or apologised on the matter.

Harbhajan Singh compared English pacer Jofra Archer to a London black cab while on commentary duty during IPL match on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

As for the match, the Sunrisers posted a whopping 286 runs on the board, the second-highest total in IPL history, thanks to Ishan Kishan and Travis Head's exemplary performances, leading their team to a solid 44 run victory.

This isn't the first time the AAP Rajya Sabha MP has been at the center of a controversy around racism, both as a victim as well as an alleged instigator. During his time with the Indian cricket, Harbhajan was repeatedly at the receiving end of racist remarks and sledging from opposition teams. He was also at the center of the infamous 'Monkey-Gate' during the 2007-2008 Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia, where he allegedly called Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds a "monkey".

Harbhajan denied making the remark, while other Indian cricketers claimed that Symonds misheard Harbhajan, who they said was cursing at the Australian cricketer in Hindi. *—Agencies*

- London me kaali taxi ka meter tez bhaagta hai, Aur yaha pe Archer sahab ka meter bhi tez bhaaga hai (Like the meter of London's black taxis, Archer's meter has also been on the higher side)," Singh said

Tamim has angioplasty post heart attack at match

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal underwent angioplasty following a heart attack during a Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League match on Monday. The 36-year-old cricketer collapsed in the first innings of the game between Mohammedan Sporting Club and Shinepukur Cricket Club after experiencing chest pain.

Iqbal, who was leading Mohammedan, only managed to field for one over before being swiftly transported to a nearby hospital. Initially, a helicopter was arranged to airlift him from the BKSP ground in Savar, but logistical issues prevented it from taking off. Subsequently, he was taken to Fazilatunnesa Hospital.

A medical bulletin from the treating doctors confirmed the gravity of his condition, stating, "We can call it a heart attack." Following an angiogram and angioplasty that successfully removed a blockage, Iqbal is under observation. The prompt collaboration between medical personnel at the venue and the hospital was crucial in ensuring his speedy treatment.

In light of these developments, the Bangladesh Cricket Board cancelled a scheduled meeting, with president Faruque Ahmed and other board members present at the hospital. Iqbal had recently announced his retirement from international cricket for the second time in January this year. *—PTI*